

## Building the Correct Advertising Frequency

Advertising frequency sure helps the big businesses in Times Square, but what about small businesses? Well, I have a secret to share: Advertising works on the basis of frequency for them, too.

It's true. When marketing a business, however, it's a concept many small business owners lose sight of. All too often, a small firm, regardless of industry, will try something once, expect immediate results, and then draw the conclusion that the method was or wasn't effective. It's what our good friend Burt Philips of Attuned Marketing calls the "One and Done" approach to marketing — trying something once and then moving on from it. It just never works. Building your brand and reputation is a long-term journey, not a one-time pitch.

Before you protest, know that I'm not saying that your message and timing aren't important. They are. It's just that advertising and marketing only work if the messages remain consistent over time. What's more, you need to spread that message across a variety of channels. In other words, don't expect that a single direct mail campaign will result in a thousand phone calls from people just itching to buy from your business! We've all heard such fairytale endings to single campaigns, but the reality for most is that you need to create multiple touch points across a combination of mediums to reach your target audience.

Here's an example. Say you've opened a new restaurant in town. Your target audience might receive a few direct mail pieces. Your new sign will be seen as people drive by. The online coupon you offered to your Facebook fans will get shared by people through emails and social media. All of this is creating a "buzz" around you. After seeing a friend's rave review and a photo of her lunch on Instagram, someone researches your business online to find several more good reviews and an article that was written about your new hot spot in the local paper. Your restaurant and its reputation are now being talked about, and the diversified marketing approach — direct mail, good signage, special offers/coupons, a social media presence, Yelp reviews, local media coverage, all of it — is responsible. Those combined efforts created awareness about your restaurant and created a buzz that will continue to grow over time (provided you continue to tap into those channels).

How frequently must your message reach your target audience to be effective? Somewhere between 3 and 7 according to most research. Less than three is a waste of money, and more than 7 tends to produce diminishing returns. As a small business with a limited marketing budget, this should be welcome news. You don't have to constantly advertise! Aim to reach your audience roughly four times within a short period of time (say, 8 to 10 weeks) for any new campaign.

Why is frequency so important? Consider the following:

1. **Your competitors are advertising, too.**

You're not alone in trying to get the attention of your target audience. Your market is likely crowded. The more competitors advertise, the greater the frequency needed to gain share of voice.

2. **You didn't discover the magic marketing channel.**

You selected a certain medium because it gets a lot of attention from your target audience. Well, guess what? So did a number of other companies in and outside of your category. More frequency will be required to ensure consumers see and process your message.

3. **Your new product/brand faces a big challenge.**

New products have lower recognition or loyalty than their competition. Therefore, new products or brands will require greater frequency to get consumers' attention, build trust, and start processing the message.

**4. Your customers have extremely short attention spans.**

You have a very short window of time to impact the purchase decision process, which means you need to accelerate the path to purchase. Adding frequency in a shorter time period will increase the opportunity for people to see and process the advertising message, ultimately moving them faster to a decision.

**5. Your message might be difficult to understand.**

Step away from the restaurant example for a moment and consider a financial planner trying to advise on retirement savings options. That's not a simple message to share. When things aren't simple, they bear repeating again and again. Increasing ad frequency to bolster such a complicated message can be extremely valuable.

**6. Some media engagement is low.**

Think about the last time you DVR'd your favorite show. Did you watch any of the commercials or did you fast forward right through them? Of course, you skipped them. That's exactly my point.

As a by-product of consumers' multi-tasking habits and emerging technologies, engagement can be lower for some media. Additional frequency may be needed to secure exposure and reaction to your message.

The other factors to consider as part of this equation are the creativity and consistency of your message, and how compelling and memorable it is. Don't be afraid to reach out for help on those elements if you need it.

At the end of the day, your target audience wants to place your business into a box, meaning your restaurant becomes "just another sports bar" or "decent breakfast place" like the others they frequent. Don't let that happen. Your brand can continue to take shape and stand out if you select a compelling message, stick to it, and remind your customers frequently of it.

Source: BGW CPA