YAHOO! SMALL BUSINESS **INSIGHTS**

PLANNING A BANNER AD CAMPAIGN

Do it right – keep your customers in mind.

Banner advertising is the most common and most recognized form of online advertising. Banner ads promoting your web site can be a great way to generate revenue, build awareness for your brand, generate web site traffic, and increase sales leads. But, is it the right marketing tool for your business?

Jim Sterne, owner of Target Marketing, an Intern et marketing company that has handled banner ad campaigns for clients such as AT&T, Wells Fargo, and Levi Strauss, says that the decision to invest in banner advertising should begin with just one word: audience.

"You have to know who your audience is and where to find them," Sterne says. "If you already do, then banner ads are worth testing."

Sterne recommends using banner ads for selling more common products and building brand awareness for higher-end products.

"If you're selling on the low end, people are going to make a snap decision," he says. "On the high end, it's about branding. I want to do banner ads so that people associate me with a certain level of service." Branding, he adds, is about relaying a specific message about your company to your potential customers. "People may not remember that they saw a specific ad, but they will remember the company's name."

Once you've decided to embark on a banner ad campaign, you have to create the ads. Banner creation is probably the easiest part of the process. If you're familiar with graphic design, you can create your own. You can also hire an advertising firm to help you create the ads or use an ad generation site. Ad generation sites allow you to enter your business's information and specifics about your ad and then automatically create a graphic for you.

Once you've created your ads, you have to find a site to place them on. You can do this yourself by networking with other site owners and placing your ad on their sites. Many businesses also participate in banner exchange programs, which usually are set up by a third party vendor. An advertising agency can also find the appropriate sites to place your ad.

Sterne says that knowing who your customers are and targeting them as closely as you can is fundamental to a successful campaign. It costs more to advertise on a site with specialized content that appeals to your customer base than on a large, general consumer site. But if you make the right investment, the return will be that much greater.

"Should I buy a whole bunch of ads and put them in front of everybody?" Sterne asks. "Or should I buy a small number of ads and place them in front of the *right* people?"

Finally, before you invest in banner advertising, make sure your web site is complete.

"Make sure your web site is worthy of the attention you will get when you spend money on banner ads," Sterne says. He likens web sites to retail space. "If your retail store is under construction, you don't want to put an ad in the paper telling everyone to come on down and check it out. You want to wait until your doors are open and the last nail is hammered into place."

TIPS FOR BETTER BANNERS

- Keep it simple. Don't overload your ads with too much text or graphics. The most effective ads

are clear, concise, and clickable.

- **Keep it current.** Make sure your banner links to the optimal page on your site. Consumers will be put off if they click on an ad that takes them to irrelevant content or an error message.
- **Keep it interactive.** Always include a call to action in your banners. If you give your audience a provocative reason to do so, they'll follow directions.
- **Make sure it's quick to load.** If the banner takes longer to load than the page it's on, you run the risk of the viewer moving on to a new page without seeing it.