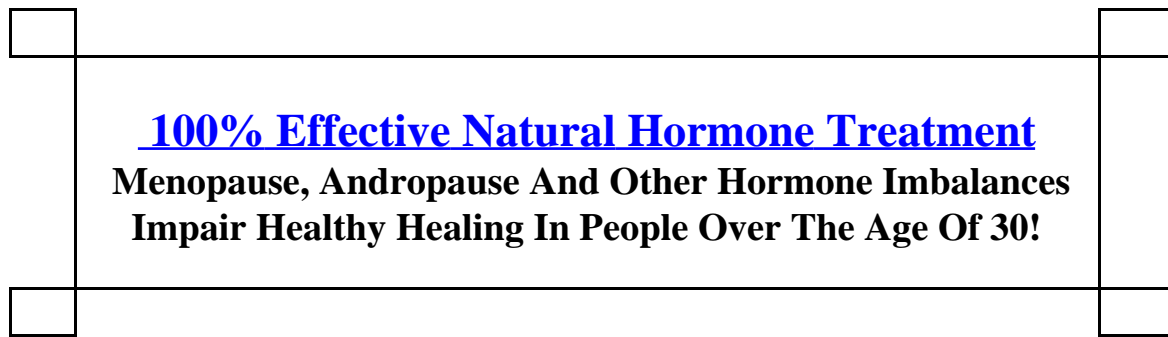


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**Attention–Grabbing Fixes that Make Your Yellow Page Ad Leap Off the Page**

**By Dr. Lynella Grant**

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Stand Out in Ways that Matter to Directory Users A Yellow Page directory presents a difficult challenge for advertisers. All the competitors are packed together, within the space of a few pages. Each ad within the directory category screams "Notice me!" so insistently, they blend into a muffled chorus. It's not easy for one to stand out with a clear, distinctive voice – like a soloist above the choir. That only happens when the business is clear about expressing its unique "song," and understands what buyers most want to hear.

It isn't surprising that most Yellow Page ads say pretty much the same thing. They were all prepared by the same directory employees. What do they know about marketing? About copywriting? About what's unique and desirable about your enterprise?

The people making the ads "grind them out," using the same templates and guidelines for every ad, in every category. Originality isn't in their job description. Following the formulas for how an ad "should look" is a formula for being ignored.

These quick fixes cut away the bland sameness afflicting most ads. Disregard for now the related issues like the ad's size and placement. Such factors just amplify (or diminish) an ad's impact. A poor ad is still a poor ad, even if it's very large. Coupled with fine–tuned copy (its own topic), these fixes will improve the impact of any size of ad, for any directory heading.

Try these Quick and Easy Fixes You don't have to be a designer or copywriter to make your ad stand out. You just have to understand your customers' unstated wants, so you supply precisely the information that they're looking for. And you need to know how you're different than your competitors. Set yourself apart, so you don't fade into the background, as most ads do.

1. Shrink the business name. That is NOT the most important part of the ad in the reader's mind. And it crowds out the space for information that that could sell them on you. Once you can get them to want

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you, they'll be able to find your name and contact information OK.

2. Ditto, shrink the graphics. They may be helpful to catch the eye initially, but add nothing to what directory users want to know. Images often distract from the ad's message, wasting its moment of attention on trivialities.

3. Provide a headline that hooks the readers' interest (the category or business name isn't one, but most ads act like it is). A strong, emotionally–charged headline pulls attention into the rest of the information. It makes people stop skimming and actually read. Provide a promise that hits their hot button in a way that applies only to you (but not every other competitor in the category)

4. Make the location easy to find. Half of all directory users scan ads for the business location first, and then only consider those ads which are convenient. Location of the enterprise overrides an ad's size or placement in the directory.

5. Display your expertise, along with a reason for buyers to seek out your specialized knowledge. Offer a booklet, class, in–depth information on your Web site, etc. This also establishes your credibility in customers' eyes, which is crucial to building sufficient trust to complete a purchase.

6. Buyers are hunting for information that can assist in making a purchase. When they open the directory, they're hoping to find a business that in some way communicates, "I'm the one you're looking for." Make it easy for them to know it's you, by giving ample information directed at their concerns. Organize it in bulleted lists.

7. Add your Web site address (domain name) and/or email address. Treat your Web site as a place to expand the size of your Yellow Page ad. Then state a reason why a person wants to check your site:

for 23 simple ways to keep your dog from over–eating Or

for

recipes to our award–winning desserts.

8. Arrange it all so the information flows logically, and to please the eye.

9. Eliminate images or phrases that appear in the other ads. Find a different, more interesting way to express it.

10. Don't let the directory do your ad for free. It will end up costing you too much.

The Ideal Yellow Page Ad The very best ad is the intersection between what a buyer is looking for, and what a business provides. When a business is attuned to its customers' priorities and needs, it can say exactly what rings their bell. For example, a harried mother will respond with relief to the phrase, "Free Childcare Provided." That service carries no weight with a business person, who may consider "No extra charge for weekend service calls" the clincher.

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What really makes an ad stand out is the specifics, not the generalities (which is what every other ad says). Visit

for advice from many experts about getting more mileage from

your ad. Or obtain a customized critique of your ad, that eliminates the guesswork about what needs fixing.

Directory users are ready to buy. Simplify their lives by making your products and services so "just right" that choosing you is their only sensible choice.

Dr. Lynella Grant, an expert in visual communication. How printed materials send signals that strengthen or undo the words. Author, *The Business Card Book & Yellow Page Smarts*

Off the Page Press (719) 395–9450

### **How to Critique Your Own Yellow Page Ad**

**By Dr. Lynella Grant**

Forget what you know about your business Your goal is to see your Yellow Page display advertisement the way a directory user sees it. You can't act like you know anything about your enterprise that isn't there, on the page. Look at your ad without pride or being identified with your operation. If you pretend it's someone else's, you can spot the flaws you'd otherwise overlook.

Mentally put the competition's name on your ad. Does what you say apply equally well to them? If it does, you haven't effectively set yourself apart. When all the ads seem alike buyers think they can get the same thing from any of them (and are more likely to select by price). The goal isn't just to look different, but to actually be different in ways customers notice and care about.

Does the ad provide the facts readers and callers need? Directory users have already decided to buy something. So they're looking in the Yellow Pages to find who provides it. This is the educational phase of the buying process. As soon as a person finds enough information to take the next step, they close the directory and move on.

Customers want information. They're looking for some reason to prefer some business over the rest. Well–thought–through ads make their job much easier. So give readers the precise information they're looking for. It's hard to do that unless you understand your customers' mindset and priorities. It helps to be absolutely clear about how you're different from other businesses in the heading.

Look at the ad as a whole Now squint your eyes so you can't make out the words. This lets you get the overall impression. Most ads just get scanned, so the words themselves are only read if there's a double–take that captures the reader's attention.

Is the whole image pleasant to look at? Does it reveal an attractive, unique personality of the

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business? Is there a business–like, competent tone? Do all the parts, from the fonts and images, to messages, all mesh and express the same distinctive flavor?

Are there distractions from the image or message? Does every element carry its weight and support the whole mood? Fat borders and cutesy graphics use valuable space, without much pay–off. If there's color, is it used effectively? Does it contribute or distract?

Notice the business name. Does it tell you what the enterprise actually does (aside from the category it's in)? Generic names like R&J Enterprises don't cut it. If the name isn't informative, you might need a slogan or tagline – but do make it unique to you.

Is the information arranged to be easy to read? Every ad is a compromise between saying enough and arranging it to clearly communicate an attractive impression. Does the most important information stand out? Is it easy to find (without being too packed in)? What catches the eye first? Second? Third?

How complete is the information? Does it provide what callers are most likely to ask about? Customers are concerned about convenience. Does the ad include crucial location, hours, extra services, parking, payment options, after–hours contact, etc.? Is there a way for them to get extra information (like a booklet or from a Web site)? Give bonus points for that.

Look word for word. Is every one essential? Is anything important left out? Is it organized with bullets or clusters so related information hangs together?

Next, consider the ads around it A Yellow Page ad never appears in isolation. And what goes on with the nearby ads influences the way people respond to yours – more than the specifics of your ad. What else is on the page, and the pages before and after yours? Be honest now, do they do a better job of grabbing the eye? Is the whole page a blur – without a clear attention grabber? And if there is one, what makes it stand out better than yours? How can you improve on it?

Assessing your ad is the first step to making a better one The real value of critiquing your Yellow Page ad is to sharpen your own eye to pick up the crucial differences among competing ads. Practice in other categories where you don't have a stake. Soon you can tell in a glance which ads have more appeal – and why.

Find free expert assistance in developing a first–rate Yellow Page ad at

Or arrange for a professional critique of your ad, so you don't miss a

trick. Either way, you'll find ample ways to improve your ad that will improve its performance. And you will be ready when the next directory comes around.

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Dr. Lynella Grant, an expert in visual communication. How printed materials send signals that strengthen or undo the words. Author, *The Business Card Book & Yellow Page Smarts*

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