Digital Portfolio: Advertising

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Abstract:

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As the field of advertising becomes increasingly more competitive, it takes much more than just a simple résumé or mundane portfolio for a new graduate to get their foot in an ad agency door. In addition to conveying their creativeness, determination, and passion for what they do, the applicant must find a way for their name to rise above the clutter of the competition and stand out as being the best and only choice for the position. One way to do that is with a digital portfolio, and that is why I chose to produce one as my Senior Honors Thesis.

My digital portfolio is browser-based and can be accessed via the accompanying CD or online at dlnagel.iweb.bsu.edu. It serves as a complement to my standard portfolio and as an impressive leave-behind at professional interviews. The digital portfolio encompasses the best of my advertising work here at Ball State. It includes a collection of ads (created both in and out of class), my résumé and contact information. In addition, it also contains various other class projects which demonstrate my wide array of knowledge in the field of advertising.

I created my digital portfolio using Macromedia Dreamweaver and Adobe Photoshop. I learned the basics of portfolio design and usability at a workshop presented in the summer of 2005 by the Digital Portfolio Center. An estimated 100 hours have been spent in the development, creation and editing of this digital portfolio and the works contained in it. The portfolio is accompanied by a paper which briefly outlines the key elements of design I keep in mind when creating my ads.
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Rules for Ad Design

No matter the medium in which they are found, advertisements use a unique blend of words and pictures to sell a product or service. When an advertisement is well-designed it can attract and hold the attention of the reader, direct him or her through the ad, and communicate the selling message. Throughout my time at Ball State I have taken several courses in which I learned a number of basic design elements that can be useful in achieving the aforementioned goals. I always keep these elements in mind when I am creating my ads, whether they are for a class assignment or simply to strengthen my creativity. The following paper is a brief overview of those elements and their importance to advertising.

The first element crucial to a successful advertisement design is balance. Balance is the condition in which all of the various parts and objects in an ad appear to be "at rest" with themselves (Book & Schick 82). It can be either formal or informal. Formal balance can best be thought of as being symmetrical. In formally balanced ads each side is a mirror image of the other, with all the visuals centered along the vertical axis. Generally, this type of balance conveys seriousness and conservatism (Denton 60). An advertiser uses it when they want to convey such images in their message and when it is appropriate for the target audience.

In contrast, informal balance can best be defined as asymmetrical. All the visual elements are not aligned perfectly along a vertical axis, but rather objects of greater visual weight or importance are placed closer to the center of the ad. They are then balanced out by smaller, less important visuals placed closer to the edges. This arrangement makes ads look more modern and open (Denton 60).
A second design principle advertisers should follow is **movement** or flow. This involves arranging the elements of the ad in such a fashion as to lead the viewer’s eye through the ad sequentially (Book & Schick 82). Once the viewer’s attention has been drawn to the ad, movement ensures that it will be directed to other parts of the ad as well so they don’t miss out on any of the important information contained within. Most ads follow a “z” pattern of movement, from the upper right to lower left, because this is the natural path our eyes tend to follow when looking at a page.

**Proportion** states that the visuals in an ad should be arranged according to a hierarchy, and the size of each element should be directly reflective of its importance (Book & Schick 82). As a rule, those elements deemed more important should be larger, and those less important, smaller. It is linked closely with the idea of **contrast**, the design principle that stresses differences.

Contrast involves incorporating different sizes, shapes or colors into the same advertisement. It attracts the viewer’s attention and separates important visual elements in the ad by emphasizing them, or, if they are not important, by subduing them. An excellent way to create contrast is by using **white space**. White space breaks up large visual pieces of the ad and gives them breathing space or cushioning. It’s much more aesthetically pleasing to have fewer visuals in an ad and utilize white space than to have too many pictures fighting for attention and crowding the page. This is the idea of **simplicity**.

As stated by Maurice Saatchi of London’s M&C Saatchi advertising agency, “Simplicity is all. Simple logic, simple arguments, simple visual images. If you can’t reduce your argument to a few crisp words and phrases, there’s something wrong with
your argument” (Sullivan 69). Therefore, every ad should be uncluttered, organized, and simple. If the viewer has to search for the message the advertiser is trying to get across, the message will not be as effective. An ad should contain only those visual images which contribute to the overall theme and message. Unnecessary items which don’t have anything to add should be left out.

Another principle every advertiser should aim to demonstrate is **continuity**. Continuity occurs when a series of visual images are placed close together with few interruptions and the brain links them and perceives them as being one continuous visual element (Denton 50). For example, a series of points directed across a page will be viewed as being one line instead of just a bunch of little dots. Continuity can also refer to using the same format, font, style, tone or colors for every ad in the same campaign. This repetition ensures the ads flow together in a series, yet are still effective when standing alone.

The final major element to consider when creating effectively designed ads is **unity**. Unity refers to how well an ad holds together in terms of its total effect. It is what happens when all the design principles have been selected for a purpose, and they work together in perfect harmony. It can be accomplished using borders, boxes, repeating shapes or background color.

When combined together, the aforesaid design elements can create visually appealing advertisements which catch the viewer’s attention, draw them in, and expose them to the message. That, after all, is the goal of any advertiser. And that has been my goal while creating the various advertisements contained within my digital portfolio.
Works cited

