

# The good, the bad and the downright ugly in advertising



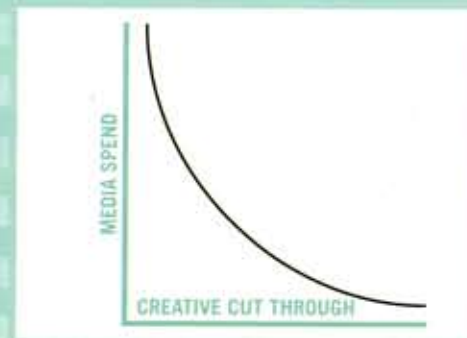
by Darren Woolley

It could be called the Bold and the Beautiful, but that would imply I have too much time to watch daytime television. Everyone has an opinion on advertising; after all, the whole reason it exists is to generate opinion. But how many times has someone in the office or socially started talking about an ad they saw only to have no idea who the ad was for or worse, attributed the ad to the wrong advertiser?

So if we are discussing advertising, let's start by agreeing on some definitions here, because advertising can be such a subjective subject.

## Good advertising

Good advertising achieves the objective and KPI set in the brief. This can be from driving store traffic, to selling units in direct response advertising to raising brand awareness and propensity to purchase. It is also targeted to the selected audience and therefore works powerfully in communicating with that audience in generating the desired response. No matter what the objective, good advertising gets the results. In fact, if the creative cuts through then the media does not have to work nearly as hard.



## Bad advertising

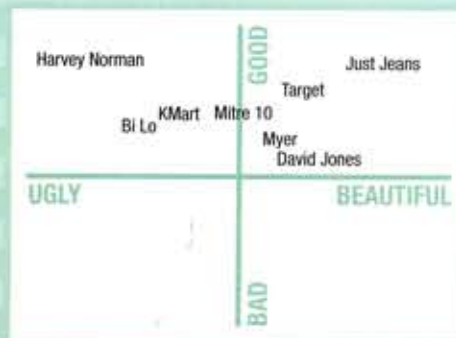
It therefore follows that bad advertising does not achieve the objectives set in the brief. Much of the wallpaper that fills the media falls into this category. It goes largely unnoticed and therefore has almost no chance of eliciting a response from the target audience, or any human being for that matter. Bad advertising is basically a waste of the advertiser's investment and a waste of time for all involved, including the customer.

## Ugly advertising

The ugly is the advertising that annoys, belittles, harasses, and irritates the customer. It demands the attention of the customer through being loud, crass, obnoxious, or shocking. It is a favourite technique of price discounters, clearance advertisers, and direct response advertising. It stands out from the wallpaper that surrounds it like dog poo on the shagpile carpet.

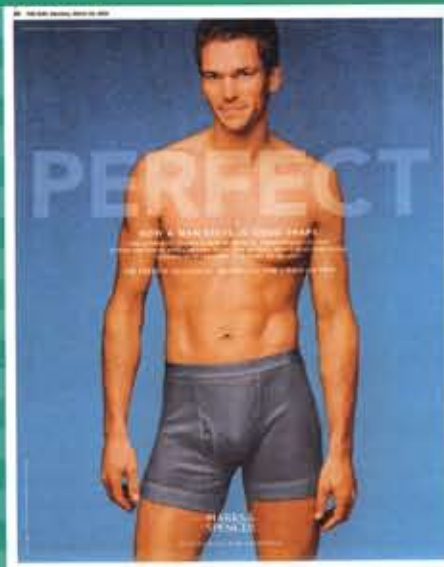
## Beautiful advertising

The beautiful is the advertising that uses charm, visual aesthetics, and empathy to capture the attention of the customer and entice them into the advertisement. Typically these advertisements use humour, appealing visuals and personal relevance to engage the customer and stand out from the wallpaper.



## The good versus the bad

Every advertiser and agency should aim to deliver good advertising. Ultimately advertising is a tool of business and therefore it is accountable for the delivery of the advertising objectives, which are defined by the marketing objectives, which are driven by the business objectives. Any advertising that achieves the stated objectives is good advertising, be it ugly or beautiful. The key features of all good advertising are:



- It creatively cuts through the vast amount of advertising wallpaper.
- It delivers a message in a compelling way.
- It communicates with a specific target audience.

## The bad and the ugly

The worst type of advertising is the bad and ugly ads. Not only do they not work, they annoy people and potentially put the customer off your brand forever. The key feature of these ads is the usually crass way they get your attention and then, having demanded you notice them, do nothing with it. If you demand the customer's attention with your advertising make sure you then reward them with a message that is relevant and compelling.

## The bad and the beautiful

Often this is created by agencies that are more interested in creating ads than in making you successful. They will argue black and blue for the "integrity" of the creative idea and if you give in you will end up with an execution all of their friends will love, but that will have no impact on delivering your objectives. One of the big criticisms of creative awards is that they judge creative cut through without the context of delivering results. One of the key things to look

out for is where humour is used totalling inappropriately, or with some kind of joke that happens to have your message stuck on the end, or, even worse, just before the punch-line.

## The good and the ugly

Many people hate this type of advertising, saying it is loud and annoying, but if it works then what is the problem? These are typically spruikers shouting at you from television and radio or starbursts and garish colours in press and print, or a jingle or tagline that gets annoyingly stuck in your head. Many discounters and event-driven retail advertisers successful use this approach to create a down and dirty discount perception for their brand. If you use this approach, it is important to remember, shout if it is truly worth shouting from the customer's point of view, and be careful of burnout because eventually everyone gets turned off a loud mouth.

## The good and the beautiful

From an agency's point of view this is the only advertising worth creating. Their first driving objective is to deliver their client's objective. Secondly, in a choice between ugliness and beauty, a great agency will usually choose beauty. What makes beautiful ads great

is not their appearance, but their ability to engage the customer in the message. What they lack in volume they make up for in being relevant, charming and entertaining. But the secret is that the core message of the advertisement is core to the execution. In this way the customer remembers the ad but they also remember the message and, importantly, the brand.

## What type of advertising do you produce?

Take the time to critically review your advertising. Does it deliver the results you need or is it just more of the wallpaper that clutters the media? If it is the latter, then work with your agency to see what you need to do to fix it. If it is delivering the results you need then the next stage is to determine if you want your advertising to be ugly or beautiful. As long as it is good, the second choice is up to you as the marketer. But in the end your customer's perception of your business is influenced in not just what you say, but how you say it. ■

*Darren Woolley is the founder of P3 Pty Ltd, a company that helps advertisers achieve maximum value from their advertising and marketing processes. Contact Darren through his website at [www.p3.com.au](http://www.p3.com.au).*