

Online creative disappoints at Loeries 2007

By  [Elan Lohmann](#)

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Being at the Loeries in Margate this weekend was amazing. It was a slick and festive affair full of joy and celebration. It was marvelous - but the state of online in advertising left me feeling rather deflated. For a start - only one online advertising contestant featured - and there was not even a sniff of a Gold or coveted Grand Prix.



The only success was two Bronzes for Gloop Digital Design. I do not want to detract from their achievement because I congratulate them for innovating in this space -but objectively the executions - although good - are on a par with what I would expect to be the normal standard for online creative. See their Bronze efforts at www.gloop.co.za/mweb/spam/ and www.gloop.co.za/applebanner/motif/index.html.

When the awards were presented hardly anyone clapped or seemed interested. It sadly reaffirmed the position of online in the ad fraternity. No wonder creatives, whose livelihood depends on approval from management, are not wasting their time online.

Not surprised

In a market where boring, innocuous banner ads prevail, I am not surprised that clients take no joy or notable interest in their online creative.

I gave a presentation at the Online Publishers Association (OPA) breakfast last week and spoke about not thinking what's beyond the box -but what's in it - making the very point that creative is just as important to getting a result online, as in the other ad mediums. Yet - we slap static images onto a banner, add some text, do a few frames and finished. Sadly and candidly, even within the publishing industry the internal house ads that publishers put out are setting no example. We should be showcasing the potential of the medium ourselves.

I can cite tons of research but to mention one - a recent study by Milward Brown analysing 40 FMCG online campaigns in the European market showed that the most memorable ads perform 3 - 8 times better with particular strength in "Ad awareness" and "Message association". The quality of the creatives accounted for 71 - 86% of the recall impact.

With the level of creative on SA web sites it is obvious to me why agencies do not want to believe that you can do a branding job online. Which you can.

Not about bandwidth or high tech

It's not about bandwidth or high tech either. Sure - you can do fantastic things with broadband intensive video and rich media - but it's not an excuse. You can still get a great message across online in a simple low-tech manner. The same principles of advertising apply. You need a clever idea and a carefully considered execution. Here are two random examples to illustrate this point: http://awards.london.agency.com/nspcc/july_05/index_01.html and www.bannerblog.com.au/2005/12/nhs_rocket.php.

From what I see coming out, I get the feeling that when online creative is needed, some elements get send down to a junior who is instructed to churn out a banner quick.

I think there is a skills shortage in the online space across the board and creative strategy is lacking locally. A problem that we all need to fight to address in our individual sectors.

There are basics involved as much as in every medium. I see these violated daily. I have provided a top 10 proven tips for you to pass onto the creative department but it's all out there on the web. Just Google it.

10 great tips for online creative

1. Show brand prominently on all frames of the ad
 - a. Make sure it is high and above the fold
2. Each frame of ad should be able to stand on its own
 - a. Produce brand awareness
 - b. Communicate message/benefits/differentiation
 - c. Communicate brand like-ability/reason to purchase or call to action
3. "Reveal" ads are almost always ineffective
 - a. In the online environment, viewers tune out quickly
 - b. You have less than 3 seconds to communicate your message
 - c. In reviewing thousands of online creative, reveal ads have consistently worked poorly

*There are a few exceptions:

 - i. Video ads are much more likely to succeed in this but still risky
 - ii. Ads with high entertainment or comedic value can be effective
4. Keep the messaging very simple
 - a. One or two messages is enough
 - b. Don't make the message too complex
5. Include a URL in the advertising
6. Don't make people work for the message
 - a. Viewers should never have to interact with your ad to see your brand or your messaging
 - b. Use expandable/interactive ads to allow the viewer to drill-down and learn more

7. If your goal is persuasion rather than awareness, be careful not to annoy the site visitor
 - a. Avoid highly obtrusive ads
 - b. Be well-targeted - don't show irrelevant ads to people
8. Product shot and human form
 - a. Include a clear product shot preferably with a person using the product
9. Integrate online creative concepts with offline
 - a. Use creative elements that are consistent with offline ads
10. Try to avoid "border" ads - ad sizes that frame the content of a webpage
 - a. They train site visitors to focus on the center of the page and tune out ads
 - b. Rectangle ad sizes do not frame content and are therefore, more noticeable

Source: Milward Brown study - "What makes a good online creative"

For a start you should be testing your online creative like any other as well as involving the elements right up front in the planning and DNA stage of a mixed media campaign.

Examples

Here are some examples of the types of things one can do online from the Cannes Cyber Lions winners 2007:

- Mini: www.profero.com/mini_whiterabbit/
- Don't drink and drive: www.ourwork.de/malteser/
- Reversa: www.neverinneutral.com/reversa_engl/banner2/
- Canon: www.bannerblog.com.au/2006/05/canon_journy_of_the.php
- Absolut: www.bannerblog.com.au/2006/01/absolut_freshness.php

Please digest this message because there are now four million South Africans on the web and they need to be spoken to in a meaningful and memorable manner.

I think we need fewer ads position on pages, bigger ad sizes and great creative to give our clients the result they need.

I cannot wait to run some great creative.

ABOUT ELAN LOHMANN

Elan Lohmann is GM of social networking and media at 24.com and Blueworld. He has been an online expert for almost a decade as publisher of News24 for three years and managing Sunday Times Online before that – establishing his knowledge in areas of online strategy, commerce, content and marketing. He is on the executive of the Online Publishers Association (OPA) and writes in his personal capacity. The views expressed in this column are his own. Read his personal blog at www.elanlohm.com or follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/elanlohm>.
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