How to create display ads »

Learn the steps to making top-performing ads for your display campaigns.

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WHAT RUNS WHERE.COM

Introduction

Getting started with display advertising? You're going to need to start thinking about creating display ads. This document is meant to serve as a starting point to orient you in the world of display ad design.

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Should you hire a designer?

Making a new display ad from scratch is easier said than done. It also takes time. You might want to hire a professional.

Types of designers

There are three main types of designers:

1. Freelancers
2. Crowdsourced workers
3. Ad agencies (not recommended for small-or mid-size campaigns)

Where to hire designers

Freelancers:

- Craigslist
- elance.com
- odesk.com

Crowd-sourced options:

- 99designs.com
- designcrowd.com

Tips

- Hire someone with specific experience designing display ads. This is doubly important if you're hiring someone to create Flash ads.

- Ad agencies are better suited to sophisticated, large-budget ad campaigns. If your media spend is less than $50,000, don't even consider hiring an agency.

- Be careful and don't waste half your campaign budget creating the ads. Limit the cost of ad creation to no more than 10% of your total campaign budget.

- Be sure to agree on job specifics ahead of time. Make sure you nail down things like: timeline, rounds of revision, hourly versus fixed-price billing, ownership of source files, etc.

- Designers can't read your mind. Tell your designer all about your campaign, your target audience, the product or service you're advertising, and any insight you have into what might work and what won't. The more they know, the better the output will be.

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Should you design your own ads?

You might be tempted to just make your own ads. Make sure you understand the potential risks and rewards ahead of time.

Top 5 reasons to design your own ads

1. Most display ads fall into a few basic layouts that are easy to copy.
2. You can often make changes yourself faster than anyone you could hire.
3. If you're low on budget, you can save a lot of money that can be re-invested back into your campaign.
4. There are no surprises.
5. You can employ design tricks that you know work well.

Top 5 reasons NOT to design your own ads

1. Despite what you might think, you're probably not a very good designer.
2. The required software can cost hundreds of dollars (Photoshop, Flash, etc).
3. Mastering design skills, becoming an expert on design software, and creating new takes a lot of time. By delegating this work to someone else, you can spend more time planning and optimizing your campaign.
4. An outside designer may have new & valuable ideas.
5. You will need to learn the minutiae of digital display ad file formats. Without outside help, this can be daunting.

Using pre-designed templates

With templates, someone else does the design work ahead of time. This saves you time & effort in making your ads. Although you might lose some design flexibility, a templatized approach can take days (even weeks) off the process and save hundreds of dollars.

One question to ask yourself:

Are you buying a template that requires software like Flash or Photoshop (which means that you need to purchase the software and learn how to use it), or will you use templates that are editable on the web with no software required?

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Photography

Not every ad needs photography, but photos and artwork can make a huge difference in the extent to which people notice and click on your ads.

Where to get photography

You have four main options for where to get photos & artwork:

1. Imagery you already own (maybe you purchased imagery for your website, etc)

2. Buy imagery from stock photo websites

3. Let your designer handle image selection and purchase

4. Take photos yourself (not recommended!)

Sources of stock photography

Inexpensive:

- istockphoto.com
- bigstock.com
- fotolia.com

Free!

- sxc.hu
- morguefile.com
- pixmac.com/free-pictures

Tips

- Use images that are higher-resolution than what you actually need. This ensures that if you, for example, buy an image for a 300x250 ad, that same image can also work in a 300x600 ad without losing image quality.

- If a designer creates your ads and handles image selection & purchase, make sure you get the raw, high-resolution image file(s) from them along with the finished ad files.

- Unless you're a professional photographer, it's not recommended to take your own photos.

- Images are an easy way to split-test different ad concepts. The entire ad can remain the same, but you can learn a lot just by testing different images.

- Only buy images that are "royalty free." The alternative is a giant hassle that isn't worth it.

Logos

A logo isn't necessary, but display advertising is an opportunity to build a brand, and it's hard to build a brand without a logo.

What makes a good logo?

Clarity – Logos should be clear and legible. At a glance, the viewer should be able to quickly understand which company is being advertised and what that company does. Logos that are too small, use confusing lettering, or are overly complex are difficult for a viewer to absorb.

Resolution – Use high-resolution logo images such as high-res JPEGs, PNGs, or Adobe Illustrator files. Nothing ruins a display ad more quickly than a "crunchy" logo that's too low-res.

Too pixelated   High-res & smooth, no pixelation

Contrast – Place dark logos against light backgrounds, and vice versa. The usually requires that your logo be all-light-colored or all-dark-colored. If you mix light and dark colors into the same logo, parts of your logo will get "hidden" due to lack of contrast.

Logo text is too dark   Everything is too light   Good amount of contrast

Tips

- Make sure you have your logo file in multiple high-resolution formats for different scenarios. Recommended formats: JPEG, 24-bit PNG, EPS, AI

- Don't try to "re-arrange" a logo to make it fit in an awkward space. This is frowned upon in the world of professional marketers.

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Helpful tools & resources

These are tools & resources that Canned Banners often relies on when we are creating new display ad designs or trying to stay updated on new developments in the world of design and advertising.

Edit photos & create graphics

- **FREE** pixlr.com – Feature-rich free image editing tool. Use it for logos as well as photos.
- **FREE** photoshop.com/tools/expresseditor – Make basic adjustments to photos with this free image editor from Adobe, the maker of Photoshop.

Color schemes

- **FREE** kuler.adobe.com – Helpful tool for generating color schemes.
- **FREE** colourlovers.com – User-submitted color palettes from people who love to think about color.

Fonts

- **FREE** fontspace.com – Thousands of fonts to choose from. Just make sure that any fonts you use are licensed for commercial use.
- **FREE** fontsquirrel.com – Great selection of fonts for designers. Everything is licensed for commercial use.

Stock photos

- **PAID** istockphoto.com – Search millions of stock photos. Buy for as little as $1.00.
- **FREE** sxc.hu – Free stock photos, although it may take a little work to find good ones.
- **FREE** pixmac.com/free-pictures – They have a paid option, but the free library is pretty big.
- **FREE** morguefile.com – Sometimes you can find unique & sophisticated free images here.

Marketing & advertising advice

- **FREE** unbounce.com/blog – Unbounce publishes dozens and dozens of great articles. Most content is centered on landing page design, but the main principles still apply to display ads. It's also worth following @Unbounce on Twitter.
- **FREE** retargeter.com/blog – The blog of major retargeting network ReTargeter. Fresh, great content is added all the time.

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About Canned Banners

Thanks for reading! If you have any questions or want to see if we can help with your campaign, please feel free to reach out any time.

About Canned Banners

What we do

- Start making display ads right now | builder.cannedbanners.com
- Create custom display ad templates | cannedbanners.com/self-serve-ads
- Run fully dynamic ads | cannedbanners.com/dynamic-ads
- Develop an app with our API | api.cannedbanners.com

How to reach us

- Web | cannedbanners.com
- Email | info@cannedbanners.com
- Twitter | @cannedbanners

What is Canned Banners?

Canned Banners is a fast, easy, affordable app for creating display ads. Go to builder.cannedbanners.com to start making ads.

Make a Display Ad in Three Steps:

1. Pick an ad template

2. Customize your ad with your own photos & text.

3. Download your finished ads in a few seconds and then run them on any major ad network or website.

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