



How To Make Your Display Ads More Effective

11 principles that can improve your results from
general-display business-to-business advertisements

HOW TO MAKE YOUR DISPLAY ADS MORE EFFECTIVE

Where has the salesmanship gone...?

We've analysed more than 1,300 business-to-business ads published in trade magazines around Australia.

Those ads were compared against 10 tested and generally accepted advertising principles, plus an extra principle we feel applies to B2B ads.

The principles are explained in this resource, but in brief they are that your ad must -

1. Synchronise reader-gravity with involvement-gravity
2. Have a powerful headline
3. Avoid reducing benefits down to the word 'solution' (our own principle)
4. Employ reader-friendly typographics
5. Get to the point, quickly
6. Deliver enough substance to sell
7. Address "you" the reader
8. Translate features into benefits
9. Ensure claims are not vague but specific
10. Tell the reader what to do next
11. Have a unique selling proposition

These principles are accumulated from the tests and publications of proven advertising practitioners over the last 60 years.

Billions of dollars have been spent discovering them, testing them and proving them right.

The findings from our analysis are always staggering...

- Less than 1% one of the ads passed all 11 principles.
- 93% failed more than half the principles.
- Less than 2% adhered to the most critical principle (a good headline).

The most common problem underlying these results is that most businesses are failing to make clear what makes them different and therefore why a prospect should favour them over the competition.

The examples we present, of what to do and not to do are taken from genuine ads reviewed. But the examples of what not to do are adapted, protecting the company from easily being recognised.

Either way, no reproduction or naming occurs. You might recognise your own ad, but others are unlikely to.

Ultimately, this resource arms you with valuable principles for improving your advertising.



93% of ads will fail more than half the principles

PRINCIPLE NO. 1

The ad must synchronise reader-gravity with involvement-gravity

Your reader's eyes naturally try to start at the top-left of your ad and finish at the bottom-right.

This is the physical structure of the English language at work. Every book and newspaper article you've ever read has been printed this way.

It is so habitual that it is entirely unconscious. There is a point of arrival on the page at the top-left, and a terminal anchor on the bottom-right.

The eye resists anti-gravitational directions of upward or leftward.

Occurring at the same time as this gravity is another one.

Your reader will follow the more natural 'involvement' gravity of illustration, then headline, then body copy.

This is the process of scanning and discovery at work... your eyes move from picture to large writing, large writing to small writing.

It follows the best application of AIDA... Awareness – Interest – Desire – Action.

First, your reader is aware of your ad and then they become interested. Then you arouse in them a desire for your product or service, and then you incite action.

With these two gravities at work in your ad, the best overall structure to adopt is one that synchronises them both. And that means, roughly, placing illustrations or pictures toward the top-left, then the headline underneath, then the body copy, then the call to action.

This works within the customer's preferred reading construct. It avoids conflicts in the physical act of reading that cause the message to be disrupted and your reader to give up before taking in your whole message.

But almost all B2B ads we see are mixing the order of these elements in favour of costly design agendas.

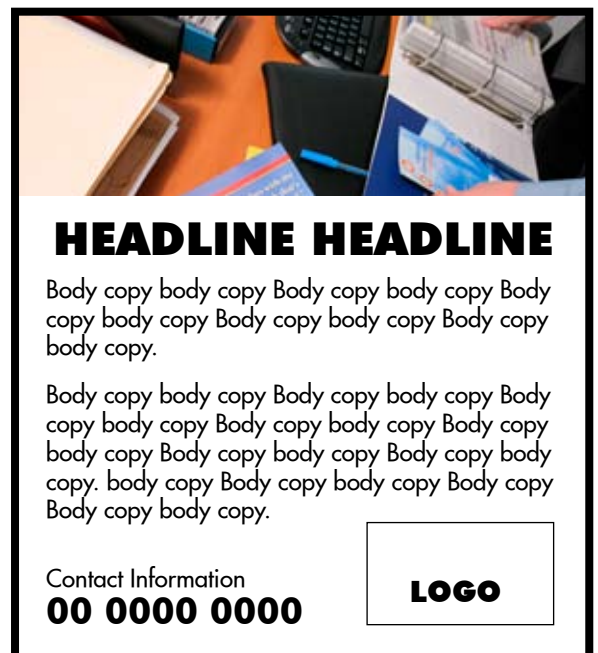
For instance, an ad that places a headline in the middle of the page, and places pictures and copywriting fragments around it, is making it hard for the reader to determine where to start.

The first few seconds a reader's eyes come across your company's ad will make or break that ad.

Synchronised reader-gravity and involvement-gravity helps keep them reading your ad longer.



This is an example of a poorly designed ad



This is good use of gravity

PRINCIPLE NO. 2

The ad must have a powerful headline

Most B2B ads don't have a proper headline. A headline serves to make a statement or proposition or question that incites the reader to enter your ad's body-copy.

Through testing it's generally established that a headline accounts for up to 80% of the ad's potential for sales-effectiveness.

The four best appeals your headline can capture are:

1. Self interest
2. News value
3. Curiosity
4. Quick and easy benefit

There is no strict rule about long or short headlines, but the ad fails if it doesn't have a headline that makes readers want to know more.

Because many of the ads we review have headlines that are abstract, or just the company name, they will most likely fail to generate the sales they should acquire.

Protecting the companies and brands, since our understanding is that their products and services are perfectly sound, we suggest these are examples of poor headlines we found in our review...

1. "Small in size but large in technology"
2. "The power to provide"
3. "At last there is a solution"

An ad is a 'sales person in print'. It replicates a salesperson.

A company would not ask one of its sales people to deliver any of those headlines as the opening to a conversation.

But unwittingly, those ads did just that.

Some of them could double or triple their effectiveness merely with a better headline.

Consider these 3 examples of better B2B ad headlines...

1. "Congratulations! You've saved \$10 by buying a non-genuine part... pity it's cost you the warranty on your \$90,000 air compressor"
2. "Slash tyre maintenance"
3. "Avoid slip-ups with new Widget Pallet liners"



These headlines lack a proposition or a question that will grab a prospect's attention and make them read your ad

The ad must avoid reducing benefits down to the word 'solution'

If only we got a dollar every time a company used the word 'solution'...

Some time ago it inferred a kind of holistic, encompassing service. But in the last 10 years it's become so over-used that it hides benefits.

Not all the ads that avoid the word 'solution' are better than those that don't... but the word does put a veil over substance.

Expand 'solution' and you get back that powerful substance.

But, as well-meaning ad agencies and managers continue to contract substance in a search for a short summary, they get 'solution'.

Our advice is to describe specifically what your product or service does and achieves.

If the word 'solution' is already in your slogan or name, expand on it in the headline and educate the readers in the body-copy.

We see great products and services unwittingly reduce their advertising effectiveness...

1. "Ultramodern ventilation and fume solutions" [headline for portable and fixed industrial fans]
2. "Elastic Solutions" [headline for ad selling conveyor belt accessories]
3. "Permanent marking solutions" [headline for laser marking and stamping machines]

These next examples could well have used the word 'solution', too, but they resisted and instead made the effort to describe tangible benefits...

1. "Rapid spill control"
2. "Seven reasons why you should not buy a laser" [headline for laser cutting services; interestingly, the company's slogan is 'cutting edge solutions' and they resisted using this as their headline]
3. "If you need any type of roller for your machine, here's how you can have your problem solved in one easy call..."

Banish 'solution' from your headlines and only use it in the body-copy of your advertising, after it has been explained in the headline or opening paragraph.

Expand 'solution' and you have powerful substance

PRINCIPLE NO. 4

The ad must employ reader-friendly typographics

The act of reading is a complex process, and it's critical that your ad aids and doesn't hinder this process.

It might sound like constraining advice, but for a guide look to the editorial of the host magazine.

There are reasons why their paragraph structure, line-spacing, font, and font-size are as you see them.

The easiest fonts to read are 'serifed' fonts. The easiest colouring is black writing on a white background.

The easiest paragraph alignment is left-aligned. The easiest size for the ad's body-copy is between 9-point and 13-point.

Vary from these guides as you wish, for selective emphasis.

But understand that your ad is harder to read if too much copy is 'tarted up'.

Two of the biggest issues we saw in our industrial ads review were in font and contrast...

Serifed fonts are fonts like Times New Roman that have small curls and ticks on each letter.

These help make the shape easier to read. We read words by looking at the overall shape of the word, and the serifs help our eyes to do this.

Sanserif (or 'without serif') looks modern but makes quick reading harder.

The contrast between writing and background was the other mistake we saw often. Look at these examples...

Many of the B2B ads we see have these kinds of distracting elements inherent in the 'typographics'... the word-features of the ad.

We don't want to infringe copyrights or reveal names, so we will not reproduce examples to show you.

Instead, we'll ask you a question that was used as the headline of a landmark publication from Colin Wheildon back in 1984... "Are you communicating or just making pretty shapes?"

Alignment

The advantage of left-aligned text is that the eye starts each line in a predictable spot on the page.

Centred text is harder to read because it's less predictable.

Left aligned: easier to read

The advantage of left-aligned text is that the eye starts each line in a predictable spot on the page.

Centred text is harder to read because it's less predictable.

Centred: harder

Size of Font

It's easier to read and understand text when it's all at a regular size.

Play with the size of fonts at your peril.

Easy to read

It's easier to read and

understand text when it's all at a regular size.

Play with the size of fonts at your peril.

Harder

Colour of Font

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog. He laughed, "you'll never catch me" and off he ran.

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Easy to read

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog. He laughed, "you'll never catch me" and off he ran. The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog. He laughed.

Harder

PRINCIPLE NO. 5

The ad must get to the point, quickly

The right prioritising of information in your ad is best points first, least-important last.

Only if the previous words were interesting will the following words be read.

So your advertisement must deliver the most powerful selling points, first, in order to continue keeping the reader, to hold them to receive other relevant messages and the call-to-action.

The reasoning is simple... time is precious when a reader is browsing.

Clever copy or affected wordsmithing delay and dilute your sales message.

Yet a lot of B2B ads we see waste the precious first lines of their ad on boastfulness or cleverness before they deliver the solid value that their product or service no doubt offers...

Take these examples, slightly altered...

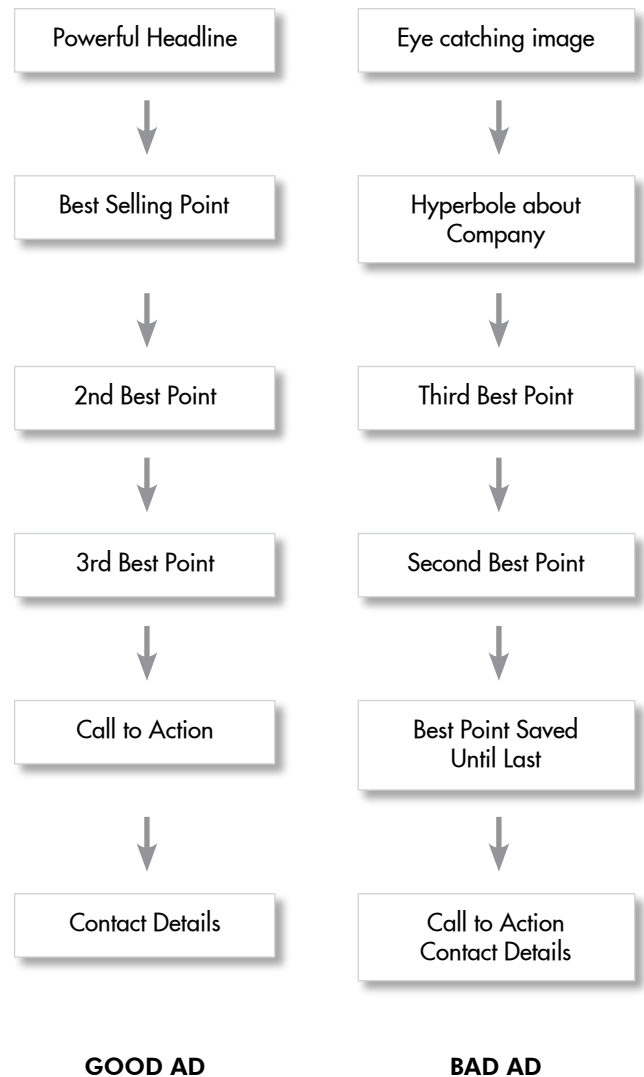
1. "The road to enterprise maturity is often fraught with delicate moments and hesitation. However, you need not endure such moments in this challenging period. At Company we offer a diverse range of products and solutions to ensure your company's growth is as safe as it is quick" [Opening paragraph, selling software]
2. "Once in a while a service comes along that sets new benchmarks in value, function, performance and style. This time it is from Company"
3. "If you refuse to make do with 'close enough', you will learn that only Brand's truly complete range of widgets covers all aspects of your needs"

But this is an example of getting to the point quickly...

"Now there's no need to weld on extensive end-plates to close off larger heavy wall open tube ends. Company stock a wide range of caps and inserts to do the job at a fraction of the cost!"

Your advertising works best if it gets to the point.

Priority of Information



The ad must deliver enough substance to sell

Your ad is like a salesperson, so it must deliver as many relevant messages as possible, provided they do not cloud each other.

A short ad that says little of substance may save in ad space but probably at the expense of a powerful selling message.

A longer ad that conveys the right messages can outperform the shorter ad that says little.

A lot of B2B companies seem afraid of 'long copy', or long wordy ads. But so long as those words are delivering value, free of any fat, they'll be read by the right people. Who cares about boring the wrong people? They weren't going to buy from you anyway.

Want proof long copy is safe? You're still reading this marketing resource after six pages, and don't for a minute think we're not selling something to you.

We often see good products and services under-sold by copy that is composed of just a handful of words...

1. "Widget temperature exchangers. Bindless gasket technology"
2. "Great quality. Customer Service. Side channel widgets. Call us for a brochure."
3. "Superior Quality! Exceptional Value! The smart widget from down under"

Examples of adequate detail include...

1. "You can buy small quantities, because our factory is set up to do any size job, or... You can buy in bulk and receive useful discounts... either way you win" [Two of a dozen separate points the ad makes in a strip ad of about 250 words]
2. "Why is the Brand different to other VSD compressors in the market? It does not need to unload and will give you air from the moment it starts to the moment it stops." [This ad put some effort into covering good points]

Who cares about boring the wrong people?

PRINCIPLE NO. 7

The ad must address “you” the reader

Ads that speak in ‘you’ language are more readable, deliver benefits better, and convey the sales message personally.

Ads that don’t will seem self-serving, not speaking with the reader’s interest in mind.

Most ads we see speak about ‘us’ the company or ‘it’ the product. They fail to address ‘you’ the reader.

We all know this, yet our ads fail to apply it... Our reader cares about what we can do for them.

‘You’ has been proven to be the most commonly used word in the most successful headlines.

The next 4 were ‘your’, ‘how’, ‘new’, and ‘who’.

These are slightly altered examples of good products whose advertising fails to address the reader...

1. “Company leads the globe in protecting hands, with an innovative array of products and solutions for all types of industrial needs...” [The word ‘you’ is not used until the fourth paragraph]
2. “The Company Brand is constructed to be more efficient than any multistage centrifugal widget ever made. Through decades, we have lifted the performance of the Brand widgets in order to meet the needs of modern industry. We improved it for 30 years...” [This ad has not one instance of ‘you’ in its material]

These examples illustrate how B2B advertising can, in fact, address the reader...

1. “If you handle granules then you need Company, the bucket elevator specialists”
2. “You can use our service anywhere you are located... we’ll organize freight anywhere.” [This ad had 21 uses of ‘you’ or ‘your’, and out of 13 paragraphs only one didn’t have one of these words in it]

It’s difficult to have too many ‘you’ words in your ad.

ACME packaging products have been servicing the Australian Industry for 35 years

Bad headline

ACME packaging products ensure your goods arrive safely, every time.

Good headline

The ad must translate features into benefits

Features are static properties and they have no intrinsic value. For instance, “The door is blue”.

A benefit is a gain to someone. For instance, “It complements the carpet”.

Benefits are the language of customers, even when they come with complex specifications and seem to be feature-literate.

But as an advertiser you cannot rely on your reader to make the mental exercise in translating features into benefits. It’s the job of your ad to do that.

Sales training insists sales people use joining phrases like “so that you can” in their dialogue with prospects.

“Our glove has double the thickness of standard linings so that you can protect your hands from the heat”.

Your ad must do the same. It doesn’t have to use cumbersome translators, but the translation must still occur.

Most ads we see fail to translate features into benefits and fail to tell the reader what they’ll gain. These ads undersell their product or service.

For example, read these extracts of feature-only B2B advertising of what are probably great products with great benefits...

1. “Self adjusting. Sealed widgets. Single, double working piston design. Purchasable as a completely enclosed or open unit”
2. “Widget offers maximum adaptability from -50° C to +105° C”
3. “Run superior control and signal processing”

Compare them with these extracts that do a great job of translating features into benefits...

1. “Excellent adhesion: will not run or drip”
2. “By loading and unloading your containers, you achieve a much faster “turn-around” time of the delivery truck/trailer”
3. “The equivalent of 5 steel drums, yet only the area of 4, reducing freight and storage costs”

We argue that ‘brand awareness’ is not enough for your ad to achieve.

Your market must instead be aware of your key selling message, and the benefits of buying your product or service.

Review your previous ads. Are you guilty of failing to communicate the benefits of your product or service explicitly?

The ad must ensure claims are not vague but specific

Vague claims are common in the ads we see. But vague claims make little sales impact.

They imply looseness of fact, or at worst mild deceit. Being specific implies the facts are true, the claims are real, the outcomes measurable.

If your product achieves 23% more reduction in downtime, your ad should be specific in its claim.

If no specifics are known off-hand, you or your agency should encourage tests to discover specifics, or seek case studies and examples from customers.

Heinz is well known in marketing circles as having had over 60 products when it claimed “57 varieties” in its advertising. But such was Heinz’ understanding of the power of specifics that they under-represented the truth in favour of a lesser but specific number.

A point to note is that the best specifics relate to benefits. Specifics that relate to features of your product or service, like measurements, are not necessarily powerful.

We see examples of poor specificity in B2B advertising all the time... they undersell good products...

1. “The new motor solution from Company, the Brand is very cost effective, compressed and the quietest motor in its class”
2. “New array of measuring products. Small size – big performance”
3. “Less energy, more profit”

Compare against these claims which are specific...

1. “92.86% experienced a reduction in the cost of recruitment...”
2. “The amazing Brand mixes 18-360 times faster than other drill driven mixers”
3. “...turn liquid waste into a solid cake, reducing volumes by up to 90%”

Which are you inclined to believe more?

**Specifics are discovered
in product testing
performance reviews
and customer surveys
to name just a few
techniques.**

**When was the last time
you put your product
or service under the
microscope?**

The ad must tell the reader what to do next

The in-person sales process requires a ‘closing pitch’ when the needs of your buyer have been understood, confirmed and addressed.

Your advertising requires the same explicit hand-holding to guide your reader to the action you need from them.

A long ad probably gives you space to describe in detail what the next steps are, why, and what the reader can expect. But even a short ad can provide a clear contact detail and ask the reader explicitly to use it.

An ad that asks for the sale is a sales person. An ad that doesn’t may be wasted.

Most B2B ads we see fail to explicitly tell the reader what to do in order to buy what could well be a great product or service...

For instance...

1. “Call toll free 1800 zzz zzz” [Obscured below the logo at bottom of page]
2. “Company www.company.com.au 9999 9999” [Listing in block format at bottom of page]
3. “Company email@company.com.au tel 9999 9999” [Placed along the bottom of a graphic, in 6-point size]

But these examples show how to ask for the sale...

1. “Phone now on 9999 9999 for a condensed catalogue of the full range of Company materials handling equipment.”
2. “Registration on the database is free. Register your details now at www.company.com.au”
3. “To obtain your complimentary copy or to make an appointment for Company to present the findings of the paper to you, call 9999 9999 or email@company.com.au”

After your company’s ad has educated your reader it should tell them what to do next.

Your readers are silently begging to be led. Your ad must lead them.

**Your readers are
silently begging
to be led**

The ad must have a unique selling proposition (USP)

A good ad makes a clear proposition.

A good proposition is aimed at selling.

And the best such selling proposition is unique.

A USP is best used in place of a conventional slogan, or as your headline, or both.

It's a powerful and under-utilised concept in and out of fashion since it was first identified by Rosser Reeves, an advertising executive from the 1960s.

Three examples...

Domino's Pizza - Fast-Food Delivery

"Delivered hot to you in 30 minutes or it's free"

M&Ms - Confectionery

"Melts in your mouth and not in your hands"

Fedex - Logistics

"When it absolutely positively has to be there overnight"

These are more powerful than slogans. They promise something tangible.

A USP is virtually unseen in the world of B2B ads despite the strength having one brings to a marketing strategy and the advertising that expresses it.

Many B2B advertisers are large corporates, in the middle of a marketing strategy or controlled from overseas.

Going through the process of deriving a USP may seem difficult for them.

But it is well worth doing. Even if it's just to position a particular product better. Ask us how it's done.

These examples show good products and services undersold by modest slogans...

1. "Constantly on the move"
2. "Inventiveness in interface"
3. "Creating opportunity for business"

Here is a rare treat... just one example of a potential USP, hidden in a graphic in its ad...

1. "Service to service without downtime" [for compressed air and cooling solutions, but the advertiser didn't feature this in place of its slogan... in our view, that would have been a winning move]

**"We'll manage your
'back-of-house' services
better at a cost at least
10% less than you're
paying now, or we'll pay
you the 10% ourselves"**

**This USP for our client FM
Solutions helped them
grow 329% in just 18
months.**

**Find out more at
strategyandaction.com.au**

Why most B2B ads don't meet these 11 principles of effective advertising

There is a separation of knowledge between those who know the details of your products or services, and those who know good advertising technique.

A lot of product managers and sales managers write ads for their product range. Their knowledge of the product or service is in-depth. But they don't know all the details of good advertising technique.

And a lot of advertising agencies write industrial ads. But perhaps they don't have time or interest to learn about the products they write about.

In either case, creativity and cleverness are applied in the absence of a potent sales message.

Advertising is a sales pitch in print. Advertising principles do not confine creativity, they give it purpose. And you ignore them at the cost of sales.

Some companies fall back on what we call "abstraction, contraction or distraction"...

1. abstract layouts and overly creative copywriting
2. contracting substance down to the word 'solution' ...and the oldest trick...
3. pretty graphics or pretty girls

But the products and services being sold don't need these in order to appeal to the customer who needs them.

Rollers and lifting equipment could have been regarded as boring but we found gems in advertising that went a good way toward selling these products.

There is plenty of inherent drama in something that is needed... especially if production, profits and people are at stake.

So product knowledge and advertising knowledge don't seem to meet much in industrial advertising, and this is a very expensive problem.

The only way around it is to make sure they do meet...

Product knowledge and advertising knowledge don't seem to meet

HOW TO MAKE B2B ADS MORE EFFECTIVE

Want to improve your advertising?

...cheaply?

We appreciate being able to show the ads of clients as illustration of our advertising principles.

In return for your permission to let us show the new ad and talk about it, we're willing to do such work for much less than ordinarily charged.

If you are interested, please contact us on (07) 3257 2955 or info@strategyandaction.com.au

In the meantime, here are 3 other examples...

This ad for Signet demonstrates a lot of the principles in this booklet. It was not difficult to gain testimonials from respected names, and those cases added credibility and allowed features to be translated to benefits.

How Coke, Boral and Day Dawn successfully code their outer cases -

There are 4 important reasons why Coke, Boral and Day Dawn use Signet systems...

First, Signet provides a unique code on every part, and at least 1000 parts before you see any other code.

Second, we only use steel to make production parts - and we make sure we get your own company right the first time, and then, a 4-point service after you see it for us to help to make it work better.

Third, Signet provides a unique code on every part, and at least 1000 parts before you see any other code.

Fourth, we only use steel to make production parts - and we make sure we get your own company right the first time, and then, a 4-point service after you see it for us to help to make it work better.

Signet Systems is a proven "managed metal" production system that provides high quality and consistent code and production control.

The system uses a patented "managed metal" production system that provides high quality and consistent code and production control.

The system gives an effective code on every part, and at least 1000 parts before you see any other code.

Signet Systems is a proven "managed metal" production system that provides high quality and consistent code and production control.

How To Find Out More...

If you'd like more information about coding your parts, we'll send you a free Signet Systems information package. We'll also have a series of valuable information packages. To get your free package, call and provide the following information:

SIGNET
 The industry's most reliable
 Ph: 133 445
 Fax: 1300 354 305

"Self-funding" Metro Inn Apartments so secure and profitable they literally cost investors nothing to own

Developed in the Orange Hill, and the Metropolitan...

Metrolife Investments and Metro Inn are proud to announce the completion of the Metro Inn Apartments. This is the most profitable and secure investment opportunity available in the Metropolitan area.

Metrolife Investments and Metro Inn are proud to announce the completion of the Metro Inn Apartments. This is the most profitable and secure investment opportunity available in the Metropolitan area.

Metrolife Investments and Metro Inn are proud to announce the completion of the Metro Inn Apartments. This is the most profitable and secure investment opportunity available in the Metropolitan area.

Property investment company Cameron Bird achieved its sales quota for this redevelopment in Brisbane, from ads and direct mail like this. Our ad took advantage of press coverage gained, and made every effort to tell a complete story.

"More facility service per dollar, guaranteed in a comprehensive fixed-price contract"

For more information on how we can help you reduce your facility service costs, call us today. We'll provide you with a free brochure and a copy of our fixed-price contract.

FM Solutions is a leading provider of facility management services. We offer a comprehensive range of services, including cleaning, maintenance, and security. Our fixed-price contracts guarantee you the best value for your money.

For FM Solutions, we provided new USPs and a letter & brochure campaign. We helped them grow 329% in 18 months and get 15th place in the 2003 BRW Fast 100. Find out more at strategyandaction.com.au

ABOUT STRATEGY AND ACTION

There are 5 great reasons for asking us to help you improve your marketing, and grow your business faster...

1. Redundancy

One of the approaches we decided to adopt from the very start was making ourselves redundant where possible.

In other words, we don't like to trap a customer into relying increasingly on us for the marketing activities they conduct.

2. Practical Plans

We don't use conventional marketing plans. They fail because they are a document and not a project. It sits on the shelf.

Our marketing strategy is a project-managed chart of actions. It sits on top of a desk and gets opened weekly.

3. Uniqueness

We don't shout me-too offers for our clients. We don't just give them pretty brochures or letters. This is wasteful – it takes too much money to get any return.

Instead, we educate ourselves in you and your market, and 'derive' for you a unique offer that makes every marketing dollar return more.

We know of no other consultants who practice our formula.

4. Testing

We don't leap in and risk client money on untested ideas. Many businesses either don't experiment, or invest too heavily in the unknown.

We test new ideas and gradually grow your collection of proven strategies.

5. Research

We avoid assuming that we know everything, or that our client does. We assume we don't know their market, and that they don't know it perfectly either.

It's amazing how much we've seen smart and knowledgeable business owners learn about their own customers.

To ask us to look over your business, for opportunities for faster growth, contact us today...

Ph: 07 3808 5366

info@strategyandaction.com.au

To arrange a meeting with Strategy and Action or to request a different booklet, fax this completed form to **07 3808 5366**.

Your Name _____ Business Name _____

Your Business Address

Your Email

MESSAGE: _____

Choose from these titles:

A Dozen Marketing Mistakes To Avoid At All Costs

The 10 Immutable Laws of Website Success

USP Derivation™ : How to create a killer offer

The 3 Ways To Grow Your Business Faster

How To Master the Complex Sale

The Privacy Laws and Database Marketing

How To Make Your Display Ads More Effective

