



How Banner Ads Can Boost Your Business

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Banner ads (animated or static) can put your company's product or message in the spotlight for thousands of people to see — which, done right, can lead to significant spikes in traffic to your website.

With affordable expense, you can create animated or static banners that convey your company's message and branding in a small space, and quickly post them on sites (as well as your own) trafficked by potential customers. You can even track which sites most of your visitors come from, so you know where to focus your advertising next time.

Here are 6 benefits your business can reap through effective banner advertising:

1. **Stretches your ad budget.** In general, banner ads cost less to create and place than other forms of advertising, including television and print ads, radio spots, and direct snail mail. In addition, they often deliver a more targeted audience than these ad forms. Affordable banner solutions can help businesses realize even greater savings.
2. **Strategically gets your name where you want it.** New websites can build strong traffic by strategically placing banner ads on sites that relate to their offerings. For example, a hat vendor can place ads on fashion sites, or an office supply retailer can advertise on business sites. Online ads offer an advantage over announcements in traditional print, direct mail, and television ads — they give users immediate satisfaction by allowing them to click to your store right away to learn more about your business.
3. **Generates qualified sales leads.** If someone clicks on your banner, there's a good chance he or she is interested in your offering. This means banners tend to deliver highly targeted sales leads. Even ads with low response rates can be very effective if most respondents end up making a purchase.
4. **Establishes your brand.** By using the same look and feel for your banners that you use for the rest of your business collateral, you can use these ads to reinforce your company's image to customers. Even if they don't click on the banner, they are exposed to your message, logo, and company image. Consistently applying company colors, trademarks, and product names in your banner ads will help your brand image stick in viewers' minds.
5. **Enables you to measure the results.** Technology can be used to measure web user response to a banner campaign. By tracking ad performance, you can determine which ads and ad placements pull the most customers to your web store, and tweak your ads, offers, and media buys to improve your response rate.
6. **You can fit a lot of information in a small space:** With animated banners, you can put a lot of rotating information into a very small and size restricted spot.

Ways to get mileage out of banner ads

The death of the banner ad has been greatly exaggerated. While it's not a one-stop advertising solution, a savvy use of web banner advertising can deliver brand awareness or trigger sales.

Yes, banner advertising has declined as a percentage of overall online advertising. Where banners once accounted for more than 70% of all online ads, in 2000 they made up 47%, according to the latest statistics from the Internet Advertising Bureau. One reason for the drop is the growth in HTML emails, now at 28%.

But that 47% is still a significant amount, given that total online advertising revenue was \$8.2 billion in 2000, up from \$4.6 billion in 1999, according to the IAB.

Banner ads can and should be part of your advertising strategy, if you follow these seven guidelines:

1. **Make your banner-ad message short and sweet.** Banner ads often are compared to billboards along freeways: You've got someone's attention for only a short time. Whether you're running the banner at the top of the web page, across the middle or as a "skyscraper" ad on the right, you must get your point across in a few words. Keep it short and sweet. Find the right words and images — including animated GIFs that allow short messages to rotate — to trigger action.
2. **Make sure the banner sends your customer to the right place.** If you're using banners simply as branding for your site, it's OK to send users straight to your home page. But banner ads that promote special offers often lure people to a home page, and then leave them with no visual or messaging clues about what to do next. The frustrated user moves on without purchasing. That's one of the biggest [banner ad] mistakes seen.

Instead of sending the user directly to your home page, advertisers should erect a separate "jump" page or promotion page that explains the offer in detail, and allows the user to take action then and there. This way you know that people *got* your message, even if they didn't act on it. To that end, make sure your offer is compelling enough to get people to click to the offer page, he says.

3. **Target your ads.** A campaign targeted to a specific audience is likely to yield better results, be it a certain demographic group or people working in a specific industry. Putting your ads on large search engines, for example, is not a targeted campaign. But here are a couple: reaching attorneys through websites frequented by lawyers, or golfers through golf magazine sites.

You don't need expensive media research to find any number of suitable sites for your targeted audience — and most of those sites are happy to sell banner ad space. Get ideas from the trade magazines read by your audience or by performing a search for suitable sites within your area, product or service.

4. **Test your banner ads with a smaller group.** The beauty of the Internet is that for little or no cost, you can test your campaign with a subset of your target audience. You also can experiment with different banner ad sizes. The Internet is great for testing messages against your target, gauging the appeal of promotional offers and the type of message that brings a high-interest customer.

The average cost of buying 1,000 impressions (having an ad seen 1,000 different times) is about \$26, a minimal sum for a test run. But it can tell you a lot about how successful your banner ad campaign will be.

Another test: See how your banner ads perform when compared to an HTML email newsletter campaign. HTML email newsletters may allow some small businesses to target their audiences better, so consider a campaign using both.

5. **Employ banner ads as part of your overall advertising strategy.** As mentioned above, targeted banner ads may work well as a one-two punch with an HTML email newsletter. If using either or both interests you, check out SCHEMA Consulting (www.schemaonline.com) as they can create your banners or HTML email newsletter



campaigns. Another possibility is tying banner ads to a direct-mail offer, where the ads use similar images and reinforce the message.

6. **Consider enhancing your ad with rich media.** Adding animation, eye catching images, logos, branding colors, sound and other special effects to your banner ad can have a marked effect on your campaign. Pros? Messages are generally more noticeable and memorable, leading to better results. Cons? may slow download times for a website.

The jury is still out on overall value of rich media, as not every computer or website is equipped to support it. But banners using rich media are outpolling standard banners significantly. If a small business can incorporate rich media in a banner, it is worth doing. For more information on rich media in a banner or HTML email, check out www.schemaonline.com

7. **Don't base your advertising decisions on click-through rates (CTRs).** The average CTR for banner advertising on the Internet is currently 0.2% to 0.4%. What should that mean to you? That there is a lot of bad banner advertising, dragging down the rest. Concern yourself with creating your own campaign, one that's planned well and geared toward the right audience.

But note that the banners that get high click-throughs may not be the best at getting "conversions," where the user actually signs up for a subscription or makes a purchase. That may mean your ad promises more than you can deliver or that your offer is not appealing. Either way, the success of your campaign depends on whether it drives users to action. Use conversions, also known as "completions," as your metric, or measuring stick. If your conversions are low, you can take a close look at your ad and make adjustments.

But trust your instincts too as Metrics are not destiny. The numbers sometimes *do* lie. Have the gumption to stick to your guns, even if it is in the face of conflicting reports.

Small businesses can't afford to put all of their advertising eggs in one basket, but banner ads (and HTML emails) have their place. The bottom line is that banner ads are an effective way to enhance your direct-mail campaign – as long as you put them in the right spots.