

## Grab Clients With a Yellow Pages Ad

by Kim and Linda Katwijk

Over the last 20 years, 60 percent of my business has come from advertising in the Yellow Pages. The solid return on my marketing dollars is partly due to the number of potential clients I'm reaching: According to the Yellow Pages, 98 percent of U.S. adults use their printed directory and 49 percent look there for business phone numbers before looking anywhere else. Also, it's a buying audience — 68 percent make a purchase within 48 hours.

The competition for that audience is tough, though. Shoppers will spend an average of 30 seconds looking at an ad in the Yellow Pages before

moving on or picking up the phone — not a lot of time to sell your business.

You're going in blind, too, as there's a lot you don't know about your competitors: which ones will advertise, what size ad they'll use, or what ad content they'll throw at you. You get only one shot for the whole year (see "Four Rules for Buying Ads" below), and with all that's at stake, you'd better make it

a knockout blow.

Even if an ad is successful, however, you can't sit back and use it again, year after year. If you're the one getting the calls, your competitors are hurting. Count on their planning a counterstrike.

### Getting Sue's Attention

Who is Sue? Imagine your target customer. Think of the car she drives and the magazines she subscribes to. The more you know about her, the better able you'll be to design an ad that she'll notice. Yes, "she." My target deck buyer is a college-educated woman 35 to 60 years of age living in an upscale neighborhood. I call her Sue.

Now imagine that Sue has made up her mind to buy a deck and is ready to choose a contractor. She opens the phone book to "Contractors, Deck." If your ad doesn't catch her eye in the split second that her eyes sweep over the page, you may as well have not spent the money on it (**Figure 1**). The typical Yellow Pages searcher takes less than three seconds to decide which ad she will look at.

To be noticed, your ad needs to include the best photo of the most



**Figure 1.** This ad is trying to do too much with too little. There's nothing to grab the buyer's attention, and having so much text crammed into a small space will make people's eyes glaze over and their attention wander. You can't say everything in an ad, so choose carefully.

## Four Rules for Buying Ads

Most of us probably don't think about the Yellow Pages until the phone rings with an advertising representative on the other end. At that point, we squeeze in a meeting, let the Yellow Pages design our ad, and sign the contract. The rest of the year we pay for the ad and scratch our heads wondering if it's producing as well as it could. Here are four rules I follow to prevent buyer's remorse:

1. Never buy a large ad just to be the biggest. A well-written small ad will pull better than a large, poorly written ad. Know your budget before you meet with the Yellow Pages ad rep. Then be firm and don't spend more than you can afford per month during your slow season.
2. No one knows more about your business than you do. Do your own design or work with a designer who knows what she's doing and will listen to you. Design your ad before you meet with the ad rep, to make it easier to decline design services.
3. Require a proof and make sure it's right before you give the go-ahead.
4. Avoid working under the pressure of deadlines — start now. If you get back a proof that has to be redone, you'll be glad you got started early.

## DECK LEDGER

awesome deck you've ever built — and the photo should cover the entire ad, with copy (words) placed over less important areas of the photo.

An eye-tracking study done by Perception Research Services of Fort Lee, NJ., showed that readers of advertising spend 65 percent of their time looking at photos and only 35 percent browsing the text. Yet I've seen countless Yellow Pages ads that have just a small photograph tucked into a corner (**Figure 2**).

Open your phone book and measure the ads to learn the sizes and shapes of the spaces you have to work with. Choose a photograph of one of your decks that portrays a feeling — if you don't have a good photo, go out and take one.

Think of Sue when you set up the photo. What will she feel when she sees it? What is she looking for? A relaxing, orderly setting? Maybe a romantic moment or a social one? Everything in your ad is for her.

### A Compelling Headline

Once you've chosen a photo, put some thought into a headline (**Figure 3**). I don't mean your logo, your company name, "30 years of experience," or "since 1989." A headline should be a compelling statement or question that gets Sue to read more. It can stimulate curiosity or a "me, too" reaction. It can stroke a person's ego, produce fear, or tell someone what to do (see "Online Connection," page 44).

Imagine Sue again — this time you're meeting her in an elevator. She notices the company logo on your shirt and says, "I'm looking for someone to build my deck. Why should I choose you?"

You have 30 seconds to answer. What would you say that would differentiate you from your competitors? She's looking for assurance that you can make her dream deck become a reality — and she wants to feel anticipation and excitement.

**DECK BUILDERS**  
ARTISTRY IN DECKS  
Beautifully Designed Built to Last

Serving Thurston County since 1996  
Fully licensed bonded and insured

Composites  
Cedar  
Redwood  
Exotic hardwoods  
Custom Railings  
Glass  
Aluminum  
Cable

Free Estimates  
**360-709-9225**  
DeckShowroom.com

Figure 2. An ad's most important job is to get noticed quickly. The best way to catch a potential customer's eye is with a photo of the best deck you've built. Run it the full size of the ad, though, not as shown above.

**DECK BUILDERS**  
ARTISTRY IN DECKS  
Beautifully Designed Built to Last

Serving Thurston County since 1996  
Fully licensed and bonded and insured

Composite  
Cedar and Redwood  
Exotic woods  
Railings  
Aluminum, Glass and Cable

Free Estimate  
**360-709-9225**  
DeckShowroom.com

Figure 3. The ad above is an improvement over the previous two examples — at least the photo is run full size. However, it lacks an effective headline, and although it has a list of materials and a couple of claims about the business, it doesn't say what the deck builder has to offer his customer.

## Online Connection

**A**t Professional Deck Builder's Web site ([www.deckmagazine.com](http://www.deckmagazine.com)), in the Business forum, is a thread I started called "Looking for great headlines for deck ads." Join the discussion, share your experience, and get my feedback. — K.K.



## DECK LEDGER

Now boil that 30-second conversation down to less than eight words. People don't read ads; they see them and swallow them whole. Shorter is better: A headline with four words is even easier to swallow than one with seven words.

Try your headline out on 20 people (preferably women who resemble Sue). What reaction does it produce? How does it make them feel? Do they want to find out more? In a lineup, compare your competitors' headlines against your ideas.

### Keep the Copy Short

Next, back up your headline with some text that's quick and easy to read. Provide compelling reasons for Sue to choose you instead of one of your competitors. Be precise and use as few words as possible.

Remember, it isn't about what you like, but about what Sue wants. This concept took a long time to get

Figure 4. All the author's suggestions are incorporated in this ad. The full-size photo draws the reader's attention; the headline lets customers know what the deck will bring them; and the call to action – “Call for Appointment Now” – tells customers what to do.

through my thick head. It's tempting to talk about yourself, but saying less about you makes it possible to say more about what you can do for Sue.

Many ads try to cram in too many words. Keep your copy simple, but do include this one element: a call to action. Be authoritative and tell readers what you want them to do: “Call now for a consultation.” Then give the phone number in bold, easy-to-read numbers (Figure 4).

## Design Help

Though I suggest being involved in the design process, I recognize that building an ad isn't for everyone. Here are two online Yellow Pages ad designers whose work I like:

Ad Revamp, 800/339-2410, [www.adrevamp.com](http://www.adrevamp.com)  
MaxEffect, 800/726-7006, [www.max-effect.com](http://www.max-effect.com)

BEFORE MaxEffect Yellow Page Ad Design

AFTER MaxEffect Yellow Page Ad Design

Samples provided by Max-Effect show the difference between a cluttered, confusing ad (above), and one that is cleaner and easier to read (left).

### Arranging the Pieces

Now you have an attention-grabbing photo, an interest-sparking headline, and trust-instilling body copy that includes a call to action and a phone number. How do you arrange these components into a winning design (see sidebar, “Design Help,” below)?

According to eye-tracking studies, people's eyes sweep across ads in a Z pattern: left to right across the top of the ad, diagonally down to the left bottom corner, and then straight right. Thus, the headline should go across the top, the body should be somewhere in the center, and the call to action and phone number should be in the bottom right corner. Place words so they don't cover the parts of the photograph that matter to Sue.

Is your company name important?

Yes and no. When she first looks at your ad, Sue probably doesn't care about your name. Once she has decided to give you a call, though, she'll want to know who you are. My suggestion is to put your company name and logo somewhere near the phone number. It doesn't have to be big, just readable.

Look at all your marketing efforts — not just your Yellow Pages ad — through Sue's eyes and keep track of the sources of your calls. Start now. When your new ad hits the Yellow Pages, keep tracking to measure the ad's success. ♦

*Kim Katwijk is a deck builder in Olympia, Wash. Linda Katwijk co-authored this article.*