**Print and Web Ads: The State of the Art**

A few months back, my column announced that “The Laws of Print Advertising Live On.” While it’s true that many elements of effective ads have endured over time, others have been transformed in response to new technologies, shifts in media consumption, and changing consumer expectations.

Darrell Davis, VP, Creative Director for Metro Creative Graphics, has experienced the evolution of advertising during his 25 years with the company and has a unique perspective on the state of the art. While Davis wholeheartedly agrees that the formula for great advertising is — and probably always will be — the combination of an engaging headline and a dynamic image, he is quick to note the extent to which technology has altered advertising aesthetics.

“Some of the tried-and-true layout rules will always apply,” he says, “such as balance, grid patterning, and the effective use of white space, all of which allow the viewer to take in content more easily. But today, having the right mix of high-caliber photos, vectors, and illustrations is critical for creating ads that successfully communicate advertisers’ specific messages and brands.”

With so many image options, says Davis, both print and Web advertising needs to engage viewers quickly and make its pitch succinctly, without crowding the space with text. Particularly when designing both static and moving Web ads, Davis suggests thinking in terms of a billboard — a message that will engage readers instantly and can be read and understood immediately.

“Anything on the Web requires that kind of immediacy,” he notes, “especially on a site where viewers are confronted with so much visual information. A Web ad needs to ‘pop’ more than in print because of what’s happening around it.”

These new needs have altered the design and content of contemporary advertising on several levels. Since today’s ads tend to be less crowded in order to be ‘consumed’ more quickly, the images they contain are often more targeted.

Explains Davis, “Increasingly, advertisers prefer images that directly communicate the benefits of their products or services and immediately and clearly relay their message. This translates into ads that include photos of real security or sprinkler systems, for example, as opposed to simply showing people who are happy in their homes or backyards.”

Another noteworthy trend, says Davis, is the use of graphic embellishments — graphic elements such as swirls and floral or dot patterns — that are added to enhance existing images.

“Following current advertising trends is another great way to engage readers and viewers,” he says. “In the past, people had more time to peruse ads. Now that we are constantly surrounded by visual images, effective ads are those that can cut through all of that visual traffic.”

*This article was written by Jo-Ann Johnson of Metro Creative Graphics, Inc.*