

Generating Response with *Vanity 800 Numbers*

When a consumer passes a billboard viewing time for the most part is only a few seconds. Therefore, the advertising message must be very succinct and be able to make an impression.

800response provides the vanity numbers, the toll-free service, the Call Tracking and the Call Recording to their customers and urge and recommend that using a vanity 800 number in their outdoor advertisements, as well as in all of their advertising efforts, will help leave that lasting impression, which will increase incoming calls.

One client, Star Dental Systems, was skeptical that the billboard campaign Dr. Larry Rush, DDS PC, was using for his "Affordable Same Day Dentures" services was working and was not going to renew his contract. Account Executive Conor McCluskey suggested sniping in 1-800-NEW-TEETH to the existing billboard and track the calls. After this number was added to the billboard Star Dental received 50 calls in the first month. Star Dental also added 1-800-NEW-TOOTH and 1-800-NEW-DENTIST as well. This addition started bringing in over 100 calls per month.

"Without the 1-800-NEW-TEETH number, Dr. Rush would still be wondering if the billboards were working for him. With the tracking reports, there simply is no dispute." Conor goes on to add "Now I have this client on the line for another market- his account is billing 380% more per month since we added the vanity number, And, I've sold him every

one of our products." Most importantly Conor adds, "this number had helped me do my job- 'I've made my clients phone ring."

Dr. Rush points out, "These numbers have definitely helped the bottom line. It sure is a lot easier to remember 1-800-NEW-TEETH when you're going down the highway. I knew the vanity number would bring in more calls- but I had no idea how helpful the call-monitoring feature would be. We used the call recordings to sharpen our telephone techniques, learn to close on the call and convert more calls to patients."

Conor says this vanity 800 number concept can be used successfully in any market- but there are three key elements: "Keep it simple, use a strong call-to-action and tie in an unforgettable vanity number that reinforces the message."

A study in June 2003 examined the direct response mechanisms- telephone numbers, Internet addresses, and local business addresses- appearing in billboard advertising along major highways in Philadelphia and San Diego.

Even though consumers' encounters with billboards are fleeting and momentary, advertisers frequently include a response device in their ads- almost half of the surveyed billboards included either a telephone number or an Internet address. Telephone numbers were displayed prominently more often than Internet addresses, and vanity numbers were strongly preferred over either local numbers or "numeric" toll-free numbers.



The surveyed billboards spanned a very wide range of industry groups and comprised both national and local advertisers. This pattern was also evident in the billboards that included a response device, where service industries such as telecommunications and healthcare, as well as durable goods such as the automotive sector and home furnishings, were all represented.

Of the billboard advertisements that included toll-free numbers, vanity numbers- numbers spelling out a company's name (like 1-800-4SUNOCO) or indicating its product or service (1-800-BAR-STOOL), dominated. Vanity numbers offer advertisers many advantages in an outdoor context, including greatly improved memorability, and for numbers that incorporate an organization's name, the ability to simultaneously present a call to action while increasing a firm's name recognition. On a billboard, where the 'medium is the message', a vanity number

becomes an integral part of the message and can provide a powerful reinforcement as well.

The fact that telephone numbers were more frequently displayed prominently than web addresses on the surveyed billboards may be attributed to the fact that many advertisers will include their Internet addresses on all marketing commu-

nications, even if its fairly inconspicuous. There also may be some expectation by advertisers that consumers will call immediately from their vehicles after viewing a billboard.

Vanity numbers offer outdoor advertisers many advantages. In a medium where 'brevity is all', a strong vanity number provides a concise and easily recallable response

device. If an advertiser is able to incorporate a vanity number into other media placements, this will only serve to reinforce these positive effects in the outdoor medium. ■

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