

# Nine Ways to Improve an Ad

BY FRED MANLEY



**Think small.**

18 New York University students have gotten into a sun-roof VW, a right fit. The Volkswagen is readily sized for a family. Mother, father, and three growing kids suit it nicely.

In economy runs, the VW averages close to 30 miles per gallon. You won't do near that, after all, professional drivers have comey trade secrets. (Want to know some? Write VW, Box #65, Englewood, N. J.) Use regular gas and forget about oil between changes.

The VW is 4 feet shorter than a conventional car, yet has as much leg room up front. While other cars are doomed to roam the crowded streets, you park in tiny places.

VW spare parts are inexpensive. A new front fender for an authorized VW dealer is \$21.75.\* A cylinder head, \$19.95.\* The nice thing is, they're seldom needed.

A new Volkswagen sedan is \$1,565.\* Other than a radio and side view mirror, that includes everything you'll really need.

In 1959 about 120,000 Americans thought small and bought VWs. Think about it.

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Back in 1963, Fred Manley, vice president and creative director of BBDO, San Francisco, made a tongue-in-cheek presentation to a local creative club on the subject of effective rules in advertising. Hal Riney created quick layout sketches for the art. Manley delivered it straight and it wasn't until the third or fourth "rule" that the audience began to see it as a farce. With Fred's permission, we ran it in our July/August 1963 issue with no explanation. The response was sensational, but we also got a few letters saying: "I don't agree with you" or "Didn't you guys make a mistake?" It's still our most requested article and it's still funny.

I'm sure you've seen a certain ad for the Volkswagen car, and heard it praised, and watched it pick up prizes the length and breadth of the land.

I'd like to nominate this ad as one of the most inept, most ineffectual, most misguided efforts of recent years.

Why? Because it's a perfect example of the disease that has spread throughout our business. A disease called "cleverness." Today, in some advertising quarters, cleverness is all that matters. You no longer have to have the selling idea. You no longer have to communicate that idea in clear, understandable terms. All you have to do is be witty. And amusing. And sophisticated. In short, "clever." And the more sane, sensible, tried-and-true rules you break along the way, the better.

The result, of course, is advertising like this. Advertising that titillates the precious few who work along Madison Avenue. That wins awards from ingrown groups of art directors. That makes conversation pieces at cocktail parties in Westport, Connecticut. Advertising that utterly fails to communicate with anyone who lives anywhere west of the Hudson River.

These are serious charges, I know—but I'm prepared to prove them. With your permission, I'd like to show you what this ad could have been—if only it hadn't worshipped at the shrine of cleverness. In short, with the sensitive aid of art director Hal Riney, I'd like to reconstruct it step-by-step, following the sensible rules that guide so much of advertising today.

# Nine Ways to Improve an Ad

## Rule: Show the product.

Don't turn it into a postage stamp or a test of failing eyesight. Show it. Boldly. Dramatically. Excitingly. Like this:



There. See the difference already? Now, I'll admit the headline no longer makes complete sense—but that brings us to another obvious improvement.

## Rule: Don't use negative headlines.

"Think Small" may be very clever, very witty...but what an idea to leave in the minds of everyday readers.



"Think BIG!" Now I ask you—isn't that better? Isn't it more positive, more direct? And note, too, the interesting use of type to punch home the excitement of the idea.

Well that brings us to still another improvement—and one of the most important rules in advertising.

## Rule: Whenever possible, mention your product name in the headline.

Which the people who thought up this ad could have done so very, very easily.



See how the ad is beginning to jell? How it's really starting to come alive.

Let's see another way we can breathe some life into it—with a warming touch of humanity.

## Rule: Whenever possible, show people enjoying your product.



That's more like it. A gracious mansion. A carefree band of dancers. And best of all, a proud pair of thoroughbreds.

Now for an improvement to correct a fault in the product itself. You'll note that the VW, unfortunately, is totally lacking in news. From year to year, while other cars bring out a host of exciting changes—it stays its own dowdy self.

## Rule: Always feature news in your advertisement. And if you have no news, invent it. Like this:



How's that for news?

## Rule: (One of the most obvious of the bunch) Always give prominent display to your product logo.

And I don't mean an arty jumble of initials no one can read; I mean a proud unashamed logo like this:



There. Now they know who's paying for the ad!

