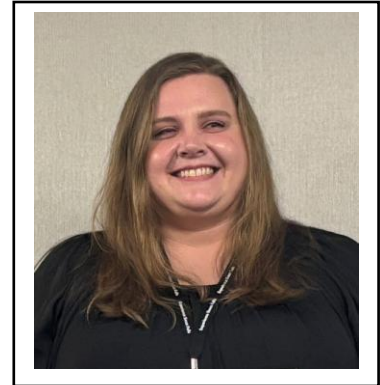


Design is a Part of Sales Too

By Jayde Vogeler

My publisher recently told our team a story about a struggling publisher needing guidance after changing their business model. After listening to them, he asked “Are you doing written proposals? Are you creating spec ads?” Answering not as often as they should be, my publisher argued having a physical proposal and a spec ad for the customer brings more value to in-person sales meetings.



This is not the first instance of hearing this kind of situation. Awhile ago, during our Rising Stars meeting, I asked if they use specs at their businesses. I learned they are not frequently requested to be created. Spec ads are regularly created by our designers to serve as a tool for our sales team when engaging with potential clients.

What is a spec ad?

In our industry, a spec ad, short for speculative advertisement, is a non-committal ad created to showcase ideas for a prospective client.

At Big Green Umbrella Media, spec ads are a big focus for sales reps to utilize in calls. Each sales rep is required to send in two spec ads per week; it is their job to bring ideas to customers. Spec ads get the customer involved in the process, sparking ideas and creating conversation. Once customers start marking changes on the spec, the ad is sold.

Using spec ads are great for multiple scenarios:

1. **When clients don't know what to advertise.** Use spec work to showcase key areas of their business—like a new product, recent employee recognition, or their commitment to excellent customer service.
2. **Refresh an existing ad.** Some customers pick up the same ad for multiple months and it starts to look outdated. Bringing a refresh to their existing ad can bring excitement back to the ad and for the client. It doesn't have to look like a totally different ad; updating colors, typeface and photos can bring new life to the ad.
3. **Showcase your designers!** In my experience, ad changes frequently consist of updating photos, replacing body copy or changing a phone number. With spec ads, designers use their creative freedom to showcase their knowledge about design and their unique style.

So what can you do?

Designers, I know we are all busy with ads that are due in two days for press. My advice to keep spec ad building time down:

Research the client – follow their style, find past campaigns they've put out on their social media channels. We don't always have to create brand new copy, headlines, images, etc. to wow them.

ChatGPT – While our creative expertise excels in layout, image selection, and type design, not everyone is able to write engaging headlines or persuasive content. Using ChatGPT to generate ideas for headlines or to rewrite a portion of text found on the prospective client's website to change the tone for a print ad is an easy way to speed up the process.

Lorem ipsum – If unsure what copy to use, utilize dummy text. This isn't a final ad, therefore the client can change the content anytime. What's important is getting the look and feel of the ad for the client to engage with.

Reduce and Reuse – Use past designs! If a spec did not sell and fits the prospective client's style, save time by reusing it.

Sales reps, I know you have a budget to meet and a deadline coming up soon. Designers need your help to create spec ads faster. You can speed up the process by gathering bullet points, sourcing potential photos, and compiling basic information to share with the design team. If you're meeting with a client before requesting a spec ad, ask them what they'd like to highlight.

Spec ads are an invaluable tool in the advertising sales process, serving not only as a creative showcase but also as a conversation starter that helps clients visualize the potential to advertise in print publications. When sales reps and designers collaborate effectively, they can create compelling spec ads that not only capture attention but also drive results, making it an important part of sales strategy.