

Creating Good Digital Ads

We want to thank Jonathan Millång for putting this guide together.

Telling someone how to make a good digital ad is a bit like trying to tell someone how to be funny. You either have the timing or you don't. I certainly don't when it comes to the comedic timing. The good thing about digital ads, though, is that you always get a second shot at optimizing and chaining things up! Harder to do that with a bad joke.

Here are some things I've learned along the way that you can think about when creating an ad for Facebook or Instagram.

1. Keep it Local

With ads, the goal is to stand out and catch an observer's eye. One of the best advantages local candidates have is that they can address local issues, which will stand out much more than let's say an ad about climate change or economic inequality more generally.

So, when talking about climate change, highlight a local beach that is in danger; when talking about economic inequality, mention how a new tax law will affect small businesses in your district. **People are much more likely to take notice and act when the issue is not only close to their heart, but also close to their home address.**

The same applies for negative ads. On digital platforms, raising doubts about a local candidate is more effective than shining the spotlight on a national candidate. There are hundreds of ads about Trump in your Facebook newsfeed, but probably only a few about your local member of Congress.

2. One Message, One Ask

Digital ads leave less room for details, background, and other things you might have space for in traditional broadcasting ads. Our attention spans are also shorter online. **So, when crafting a digital ad, focus your message, and have only one ask.**

It can be tempting here to cheat, and possibly add additional messaging in the Facebook or Instagram text or caption box (that is separate from the ad graphic). Try to resist that temptation. It is better if the text copy is sending the same succinct message and making the same exact ask as whatever graphic you are using.

Thumbs scrolling down social media feeds are impatient! Don't let your voters miss

your ad because you're trying to cram in too many talking points.

3. Some Issues Are Better Than Others

Just like on the stump, some issues capture people's attention faster and pique their interest. Know your town and your community and what interests them the most. If there is an environmental issue in your district, talk about that. If education funding has been slashed, think about how to message your plan in an ad.

Before you click 'publish,' think about how current and newsworthy the political issue is, as well as how easy the issue is to understand, imagine, and stir up emotions for voters. For example, a report from two years ago showed that the European Union had a hard time generating support for the TTIP agreement online, because the potential negative effects of a free trade agreement between the United States and the EU were much easier to exemplify on digital platforms than the potential positive effects. When all you have is an image, two lines of copy and a little more than 100 characters, explaining economic theory is hard, while raising environmental and privacy concerns are easier.

Digital ads leave little room for explanation, so most of that explanation and conscious formation of a political issue needs to have taken place for a voter before they see your ad. **Then, when they see your ad, they recognize the issue, know the context for the issue, are moved by your ad, and are ready to take action on your ask.**

4. Measure and Optimize the Efficiency of Your Digital Ad

Using metrics to measure how well your ad is doing, especially in the first couple of days after publishing, is essential when using digital tools and platforms. Doing so will allow you to adjust your advertisement spend in real time. If the ad is doing really well, consider boosting the ad spend. If it is not doing well, consider decreasing the ad spend or taking down the ad completely.

Making adjustments as you go much easier on digital advertising, so use the opportunity to optimize your message and spending when using digital tools and platforms.

When measuring your digital ads, look at all the traditional metrics, such as **clicks**, **impressions**, **click-through-rate**, **cost per click**, and **conversions**, but also consider looking at the ***share of your reach that is organic***. This metric will give you an idea of how engaging your message and ad is.

"Organic" simply means that someone received your ad without it being a paid

impression. In other words, they already liked your page, someone they're friends with on social media interacted with your post, or the mysterious Facebook algorithm simply decided that the ad would be of interest to that person. When a large share of your total reach is organic, it means your ad is generating a lot of engagement, whether that be likes or shares. When that happens, your ad will show up in more people's newsfeeds without your campaign having to spend more money. This is not only good because it will get more eyeballs on your ad for a lesser amount of money, but most importantly it shows your message is actually exciting and engaging for voters.

When your message is engaging and exciting, all of those other metrics like CPA (cost per acquisition), CVR (conversion rate), and dollars raised will usually fall into place.

5. Test Your Big Spend TV Commercial on Facebook First

Last, but not least, digital channels are an incredibly effective and incredibly cheap way for your campaign to test its message. This is true for making your emails and ads continuously more effective, but also for testing TV ads before they go up. Specifically AB-testing—having two or more versions of a TV ad or an email subject line for example—and examining which version works best online, can give you a much clearer answer for which option to choose when you publish the message in a traditional media outlet (which is often much more expensive than digital ads). If none of the versions are getting any engagement on Facebook, you may have to change something before it goes to TV broadcasting.