# SERVICE ADVERTISEMENT

Service advertisements are prototype advertise-ments that allow us to (re)focus on the core value proposition and test the desirability and perceived value of a new offering.

| Duration | From 15 minutes to a few hours (for adver-tisement posters – other formats can take longer to prepare and produce) |
|---|---|
| Physical requirements | Flipchart paper and a selection of flipchart markers, A4 paper for initial sketches, sticky notes, digital camera, tape |
| Energy level | Mid to high |
| Researchers/Facilitators | O or 1 |
| Participants | 1 or more (4–8 is a good group size) |
| Research techniques | Participant observation, inter-views, co-design |
| Expected output | Research data (specifically bugs, insights, and new ideas), raw video footage and photos, quotes from the test audience, as well as the advertisements themselves (e.g., posters or video prototypes of enacted advertisements) |

Developing service advertisements as prototypes can help you quickly ex-plore and capture potential core value propositions that are inherent in a design concept. In the design team, creating a service advertisement can also help the team to (re)focus on the core val-ue proposition of a prototype or idea. Later, they can be used to test if the target audience understands and values the innovation.

The most widely adopted form for a service ad is the simple advertisement poster (or ad poster) – a fairly big A1 or A0 poster that uses concise slogans, en-gaging visuals, and text to communicate or sell in public places like bus stops or shopping centers. Further into the project, service advertisements can also be created as online ads, web landing pages, or TV or video advertisements – including in-depth documentary-style variants.

When taken to a wider audience for test and research, service advertise-ments have proven to be very effec-tive in implementing a "fake it before you make it"-approach to prototyping. Online shoe retailer Zappos did not start by prototyping expensive and complex distribution or warehousing systems. Instead, the founder created a prototype

which focused on exploring and evaluating the core value proposition: will customers be willing to actually buy shoes online? He set up a lightweight web shop to sell shoes. Anytime someone ordered a pair, he would pop over to one of the local stores, buy them at full price, and mail them. Thankfully, he discovered that there actually was a demand. In 2008, Zappos hit $ 1 billion in annual sales, and it was sold to Amazon in 2009 for $ 1.2 billion.[01]

Effectively, many campaigns on crowdfunding platforms can also be seen as advertisement prototypes trying to sell (a) the service or product and (b) trust in the team that they will be able to implement when the funding campaign is successful.

When creating an advertisement prototype, it can be useful to remember Elmer Wheeler's famous quote: "Don't sell the steak, sell the sizzle. It's the sizzle that sells the steak and not the cow. Hidden in everything you sell in life is a sizzle. The sizzle is the tang in the cheese, the crunch in the cracker, the whiff in the coffee and the pucker in the pickle."[02] This implies that you need to go beyond simply describing the facts about your new product. Take a family car, for example. It might be nice to know (for some) that it features a steel cage made from hot-formed boron steel ("steak"). But what matters more: this thing ("boro …WHAT?") keeps your family safe ("sizzle").[03] On the other hand, only talking about the benefits – the sizzle – won't work either. Nobody will buy "a mystery product that will make you rich" without knowing at least roughly what they are buying.

For prototyping purposes, it is key to go for a balance. Your service advertisement needs to explain ==enough facts and details ("steak") that the audience can understand what the new service or product actually is==, but it also needs to convey ==enough emotion ("sizzle") that they can also understand why they should care.== With this combination, there is a good chance of valuable feedback from your research audience.

## Step-by-step guide
### PREPARATION

In this example, we will assume the service ad is to be a poster. Other media can be developed in a similar way.

**1** **Choose an audience:** Who is the target audience for this advertisement? Choose a persona, a specific user type, or a key stakeholder and familiarize yourself with the audience.

**2** **Briefly review scope and clarify prototyping questions:** Briefly reflect. What is your scope? What do you want to learn? Do you want to test the concept or just a part? Which part are you most interested in? Also think about the context: in which step of the customer journey will the advertisement play a role?

**3** **Brainstorm potential content:** Do a brief brainstorming on ideas for emotional ("sizzle") and factual ("steak") content as input for the poster. What do you want to communicate in the advertisement? What could be suitable emotional hooks or narratives? What are the facts?

01 Adapted from Ries, E. (2011). *The lean startup: How Today's Entrepreneurs Use Continuous Innovation to Create Radically Successful Businesses*. Crown Books.

02 See Wheeler, E. (1938). *Tested Sentences That Sell*. Prentice-Hall.

03 Another version compares "sausage" to "sizzle." You can't sell a sausage by describing it – "a cleaned-out animal intestine filled with unsellable waste meat" is accurate but unappetizing. You have to sell it with the sizzling sound of "zzzzzsh."

**4** **Sketch out the advertisement:** On flipchart paper, individually create multiple quick sketches to advertise your service. Remember, ads must be quick and easy to understand, so use images and very few words, and choose them carefully. Most people will look at advertisement posters for no more than a few seconds. It is therefore key to focus on the core messages. Select the ones you want to take forward and test with an audience.

## Step-by-step guide
USE/RESEARCH

**1** **Test the advertisement:** Show your advertisements to people who do not yet know your project and collect their feedback: What do they think the advertisement is for? What are the hard facts they have learned about the product? What are the emotional aspects? Would they want to learn more? Would they want to buy?

**2** **Keep a list of bugs, insights and ideas, and review issues:** Make sure to record your observations over the whole test and create a list of the issues that you discover. After each testing session, discuss what worked, what didn't work, what you would like to change or try next. Prioritize.

**3** **Revise your advertisements (optional):** Are there any changes you can or should make right now? Remember that changes to an advertisement poster can be made very easily and quickly. Do them now.

**4** **Decide on the next steps and iterate:** Check off what you just tested and quickly decide what to do next. Then go again.

**5** **Document:** Document and finalize your work. Use photos or videos of your advertisement and its variations as well as key interactions to document the latest version(s). Briefly reflect on your documentation and identify the critical issues, problems, or opportunity areas that need

to be addressed in the next steps in the design process.

**6** **Present (optional):** Using a storytelling approach, present your last iteration and key learnings to other stakeholders and gather feedback. It is often useful to also capture the presentation and the final feedback rounds on video and add them to your documentation.

## Method notes

→ **Use advertisement-specific ideation cards:** If there are no ad specialists in the team, consider using specific ideation cards like Mario Pricken's Creative Sessions cards.[01] Those card sets are based on a surprisingly manageable number of creativity patterns that emerged through an in-depth analysis of a broad range of successful advertisements. These patterns

01 A great card set (in German) for ideating advertisements is Klell, C., & Pricken, M. (2005). *Kribbeln im Kopf: Creative Sessions*. Schmidt. It is based on the book Pricken, M. (2008). *Creative Advertising: Ideas and Techniques from the World's Best Campaigns*. Thames & Hudson. Also see *Using cards and checklists* in #TiSDD 6.4, *Ideation methods*.

can be used in your ideation and significantly enhance the quality of the resulting advertisements.[02]

→ **Act out the advertisement:** Play with the format. Also use theatrical techniques like investigative rehearsal to improvise and quickly act out a TV ad. Simulate a quick sales pitch in the shop.

→ **Consider your brand:** When discussing the scope of the prototyping session, be aware that advertisements always are very much interlinked with your brand. If you have to work with an existing brand, you can choose to follow the given corporate identity, or you can explicitly go beyond or even ignore it altogether. This allows you to explore the mutual influence of your brand on your service or product and helps you assess a potentially necessary brand stretch. "Will people buy this?" is quite different to "Will people buy this from (insert your startup/multinational/ nonprofit organization/public sector organization/ …)?" ◄

02 Goldenberg, J., Mazursky, D., & Solomon, S. (1999). "The Fundamental Templates of Quality Ads." *Marketing Science*, 18(3), 333-351.

A  Service advertisement posters are a fast and engaging way to quickly explore, clarify, and test your value proposition.