

# 17 Tips to Make Yellow Page Advertising Pay Off

Phone directory advertising is expensive. And for many business owners that rely on leads from yellow pages, it can literally make or break their business. Knowing how to use this resource is critical. The following tips will help you make key decisions about whether and how to use phone directory ads to promote your business.

1. **Yellow pages aren't for everybody.** You should know up front if prospective customers even look in a phone directory to find your kind of business. Check for evidence of your competitors using this resource before you invest.
2. **Consider using localized Internet search** (e.g. Google, Yahoo, etc.) Recent research indicates people are increasingly abandoning hard-copy directories in favor of finding providers listed on the Internet. While it doesn't mean there is no value to phone directory ads, you may want to devote some budget to search engine advertising.
3. **The yellow pages are a zero-sum situation.** There are only so many people looking for your kind of business in the yellow pages. The big question is how many calls you will get. If you get more, someone else gets less. And vice versa.
4. **Avoid "off brand" books.** Yes, they will give you a cheaper price than the more well known books—and there's a reason. They typically don't have the readership and/or distribution of the big boys, which means your return on investment (ROI) on second or third-tier directories may not be worthwhile. What good is a cheap ad if almost no one reads it? It's still wasted money.
5. **Consider calling some of your competitors listed in the yellow pages.** Of course, you will have to use a stealth approach, perhaps posing as a prospective advertiser in a new non-competing business. Ask how the ad is working, how many leads it produces, etc. If other companies aren't getting any results, you may want to skip being in the book altogether.
6. **Make sure you're in the right category.** If you're an attorney, it's pretty easy to know what category you should be in. But not so for all businesses. If you sell toner cartridges, do you go under "T" for toner, "P" for printers or "C" for copiers? Do this: whatever you sell, randomly call 25 likely prospects and ask them, "If you were looking for toner cartridges, what section of the yellow pages would you look in?" Let your prospects tell you where to be—don't guess!
7. **The salesperson is your enemy:** His/her only goal is to sell you the most expensive ad possible. You should distrust any advice that comes from his/her mouth unless they back it up with verifiable data. Most deadly could be advice on the content of your ad. These representatives are trained in sales—not marketing—and most don't have your best interest at heart.
8. **Don't get swayed by the "Internet ad Included for free" ploy.** Directory reps love to make you think that getting a listing in their online pages is going to make you a billion dollars. But Internet yellow pages haven't performed as well as

expected—at least, not yet. In fact, localized search is more popular than Internet yellow pages. Base your purchase decision on the value of the printed directory ad alone.

9. **Size matters.** Large ads usually out pull smaller ones. Bigger is usually better and portrays a “better,” more able company. Size also gives you room to educate more fully. If you're a major competitor, your ad needs to be at least average size for your classification. If you have to choose between size and color (due to your budget), ALWAYS pick a bigger size instead of extra colors. Buy the biggest ad your budget can handle.
10. **Position also matters.** It is better to be at the front of the section and/or at the top of the page. All else being equal, color outperforms black and white. However, a powerful black and white ad can attract more prospects than a poorly conceived color ad.
11. **Avoid extra colors.** Spot color is fine. Try a white background and black text. NEVER buy four-color ads. It just adds extra expense... without extra results.
12. **Don't change your ad for the sake of change.** If you're sure you can improve your results, fine. But if you're already running a directory ad and you're pulling the majority of leads, think twice. First evaluate the other ads for the same service or product, and carefully consider (and test) your proposed changes.
13. **The headline is essential.** People scan ads and stop only when something “grabs” them. Your headline is the “ad for the ad,” so make sure it's relevant to something that's on your prospects' minds. Never put your company name as the headline.
14. **Directory ads need to educate**—or lead prospects to readily available information that educates. Most people looking in the yellow pages are “now” buyers, meaning they want a provider quickly and aren't necessarily looking for extensive information. Use ad copy to specifically and quantifiably explain why and how you will solve their problem. Avoid generalized platitudes that your competitors are probably using in their ads.
15. **Testing your ad before you run it is a must.** If you are wrong, you are stuck with a bad ad all year and have to pay for it even if it doesn't work. Ask people you know—particularly customers and prospects—what they think of your ad before committing to it. At the very least, have your friends and associates review your proposed ad.
16. **Don't waste your real estate.** Don't spend time, money, or effort telling people stuff they already know. If you build fences, don't say “We build fences.” Instead, your copy should address about what prospects need to know about fences, and what you do that makes you a better value than your competitors.
17. **Track your leads.** Always ask how people got your number and record their response. Over weeks or months, you'll be able to tell how many calls you're getting from your yellow page ad as well as other sources. You'll need this information to make better decisions when it's time to renew your ad next year.