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Hearing Aid Advertising

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I maintain a file on consumer hearing aid advertising sent to my home. I do this more out of habit than to help me determine which hearing aid I should purchase. Out of interest, I pulled 48 different ads from recent months of direct mail pieces and newspaper ads and reviewed them to find out what messages were being sent to consumers. I eliminated duplicate ads, of which there were many. I wanted to find out what decisions hearing impaired individuals had to filter through to help them complete the “call to action” so necessary in any sale. In other words, did the messages provide sufficient information to cause one to entertain purchasing?

General Message Themes

What follows was taken from this recent stack of direct mail and newspaper ads/inserts. Although there may be more general message themes in the overall population of hearing aid sales than shown here, I believe that it would be fair to say that the list below is representative of what can be expected generally.

- New product introduction
- Factory trained expert
- Open house
- Research study
- Anniversary event
- Free demonstration
- Routine hearing checkup
- Annual hearing health evaluation
- Field testing of a new product
- Private showing
- Special hearing event
- Special factory discounts
- Grand opening
- Certification office notice
- Special notice
- Trade up / buy back
- New technology
- Celebrity endorsements
- Satisfied user endorsements
- Hear in noise
- Hear comfortably
- Special sale

None of the general themes would draw attention unless the words “hearing,” “hearing loss,” or “hearing aids” was not prominent in the headline. What I found most interesting is that these are essentially the same advertising themes used a decade, and even longer, ago, based on my many years of experience as a VP of Marketing for a hearing aid manufacturer.

General Messages

More important, however, are the messages being sent within these themes. What is the content to draw a person to follow through after reading the headline? In the following list are messages from these ads that have been used for the past 10 years, and even much longer for some.

- You will have our most advanced hearing technology
- Loud noise softened while soft speech is made louder
- Celebrity, local person, satisfied user, etc. endorsements
- Hear all the sounds of life
- Cosmetics, small size, invisible
- Reasons to schedule your annual hearing health evaluation
- Limited to first 15 people who contact us
- Designed to assist those who:
    - Hear conversation, but can’t understand the words
    - Have trouble understanding with background noise
    - Have trouble hearing while on the telephone
    - Hearing sounds, but not being able to distinguish certain words
    - Frequently asking people to repeat themselves
    - Having difficulty understanding when two or more people are talking
    - Turning the TV louder than normal
- No batteries to purchase
- Programmed to fit your specific hearing loss requirements
- Let us introduce our new products to you and receive: (gift cards for hams, turkeys, candy, meals, etc.)
- Free lunch, meal, etc. at a specific location if you just listen to what we have to say
- Field test of remarkable new hearing instrument
- No volume controls to adjust
- A computerized verification of hearing aid fittings to your hearing prescription
- Clinically proven to help people hear naturally and comfortably
- A computerized digital hearing instrument so small it hides out-of-sight while it performs millions of precise calculations per second to give you the highest range of comfortable hearing
- Complimentary fiber optic otoscope examination
- Free hearing evaluation
- Free product demonstration
- Free hearing aid consultation

Advertising messages, including terminology, that seem to be carrying a slightly new message in the last decade included:

- Maintain speech understanding in noisy environments and reduce listening effort
- Enhance phone calls (Can detect when you’re on the phone and adjust settings for optimal listening)
- Tinnitus treatment solutions available – designed to deliver all day relief
- No maintenance

- Help us compare the latest “Open Invisible” Hearing Aid Technology
- Improve listening to music and TV (you can stream stereo sound directly from your TV, radio and your computer to your hearing aids, like headphones.)
- A revolutionary hearing aid that can hear like your ear does
- Hearing aids resistant to water, wax, sweat, oil, and corrosion
- Automatic sound adjustment
- Nanotechnology – miniaturization taken to a whole new level
- Only trust your ears to a doctor of audiology (AuD)
- Virtually eliminate whistling and buzzing
- Use of ear-to-ear communication to further enhance clarity

Only once, in the content I reviewed, was there a statement related to the evaluation of a fitting to some, or any accepted standards (“A computerized verification of hearing aid fittings to your hearing prescription”). And never was directional microphone technology mentioned.

Summary

All in all, there was nothing to show that these ads showed any imagination, or any approach that was significantly new. Instead, they tended to follow traditional paradigms for presenting their messages to consumers. Does this imply that this advertising is ineffective? Not necessarily. But, might it suggest that this may contribute to the low level of market penetration of hearing aid sales? In other words, as advertising material, the frequency with which it was received achieved one purpose of advertising – exposure. But, did it fulfill the “call to action,” which I assume was the primary purpose of sending these ads?