

# How to Use Low-budget, Creative Classified Ads to Hook More Customers

If you're a very small business with a very small budget, this idea is pure poetry. And I mean that literally.

But to explain, I need to tell a story.

I was talking with Vermont Yarn Company, a charming store full of knitting and crocheting supplies near the small town of Middlebury, Vermont.

Woody Allen said, "Eighty percent of life is just showing up." Vermont Yarn's problem was that they were not showing up. The store is located on a highway, a couple of miles outside of the downtown where most local people do their shopping. As a result, many people didn't even realize they were there.

(When people did come into the store, they often said things like, "I've lived in Middlebury for years, and I didn't realize you were here!" Or, "I've been driving past here for years, but I never stopped in. Now I'm glad I did.")

## A Faint Blip on the Customer's Radar Screen

In other words, Vermont Yarn was a tiny, faint blip on the edge of the customer's mental radar screen.

To complicate matters, Vermont Yarn didn't have the budget to run good-sized regular ads in the local weekly newspaper. At best, they could only afford classified ads. And they couldn't afford to move to an in-town location where they would be more visible.

*So how could Vermont Yarn make a big impact with a small budget?* As I thought about their situation, I was reminded of another marketing story from long ago.

In 1925, the Burma Shave shaving cream company was in the red and struggling to survive. Alan Odell, the son of the company founder, came up with a marketing idea, but his dad said they could only afford \$200 to try it out. Alan used the \$200 to create a series of small road signs featuring poems that he made up. Every poem was in four, five, or six lines: you would be driving along and see the first line of the poem, then a

hundred yards further the second line on a second sign, then the third line and so on. And the poem always ended with a sign that said, simply, Burma Shave. Let me give you a few examples.

**Candidate says  
Campaign confusing  
Babies kiss me  
Since I've been using  
Burma Shave**

Isn't that charming? Here's another:

**The whale put Jonah  
Down the hatch  
But coughed him up  
Because he scratched  
Burma Shave**

Here's one more:

**My job is keeping  
Faces clean  
And nobody knows  
De stubble I've seen  
Burma Shave**

Because they were charming, humorous, and unexpected, these signs got much more attention than many of the larger, more expensive billboards that delivered more typical advertising messages.

And despite the low budget, this campaign was tremendously successful. People noticed them, remembered them, and looked eagerly for the next one. Awareness of Burma Shave shot up...and so did their business.

(I still remember the signs from my boyhood in New Mexico in the 1960s.)

## **Could this Idea Work for Vermont Yarn?**

I believed that this could be an effective way to get the attention of knitters and crocheters for Vermont Yarn, even in the small space of a classified ad. So I created a series of small, “poetic” classified ads for them. Here are a few:

**Just the thing**

**For storm and puddle:**

**Knitted sweaters**

**Warm and cuddle.**

**VERMONT YARN CO.**

**Route 7 So., Middlebury**

**Yarns and needles!**

**Books and kits!**

**Your hands will have**

**Some happy fits!**

**VERMONT YARN CO.**

**Route 7 So., Middlebury**

**Wind up here**

**And you’ll unwind:**

**Our yarns will**

**Liberate your mind.**

**VERMONT YARN CO.**

**Route 7 So., Middlebury**

It’s not literature, of course, but it does stand out from other classified ads and get people to notice the ad—even in a small space.

Vermont Yarn began running these classified ads every week—something they could easily afford to do. And before long, customers began coming into the store saying things like, “We really like your ads!”

I encouraged Vermont Yarn to stay with this strategy month after month. The key to a low-budget strategy like this is to be consistent and persistent, to never give up, and to keep showing up. And sure enough, in a few months, business began to increase.

This approach may not be appropriate for every business. But *if you don't have a lot of money to spend on advertising, and you want to make your ads stand out, it's often worth trying something a little different, even a little outrageous.* Be creative. Stretch the possibilities. And consider using creative classified ads.

When people begin coming into your place of business saying, "Hey, I get a kick out of your ads!" then you'll know that you are really *showing up!*

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**If you think a classified ad campaign might be right for your business—or if you have some other marketing need or question—call Geoffery Moore at 1-603-353-4700. Or send an email to [bullseye@YourBestMarketingMove.com](mailto:bullseye@YourBestMarketingMove.com). Geoffery will give you a free consultation to help determine your best marketing move.**

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