BEST PRACTICES

BUILDING THE PERFECT DIGITAL AD

In a typical month, ad campaigns within the SmartBrief network generate nearly 100 million impressions and more than 200,000 clicks.

While formats for each campaign type vary, most ads contain several of the same elements: an image, a headline, ad copy and a call-to-action. Each component plays a role and can have a major impact on the performance of your campaign.

Here are our tips and best practices for creating successful digital ads.

AD IMAGE (180X150)

HEADLINE (39 CHARACTERS)

Your assessment plan may be blocking your view
Hidden gaps...data use errors...time-wasting redundancy...are these issues lurking in your assessment system? If so, you aren't getting a clear picture of student learning. This webinar will reveal three common issues and show you how to resolve them. Register now!

ADVERTISEMENT

AD COPY (227 CHARACTERS)

CALL-TO-ACTION

THE IMPACT OF IMAGES

Your image makes a first impression and is often the difference between a successful campaign and one that fails to meet expectations. In fact, our data shows that including a graphic at all can have a major impact on performance.

Across the SmartBrief network, native ads that feature an image, regardless of its content or quality, outperform those that do not by nearly 50%.

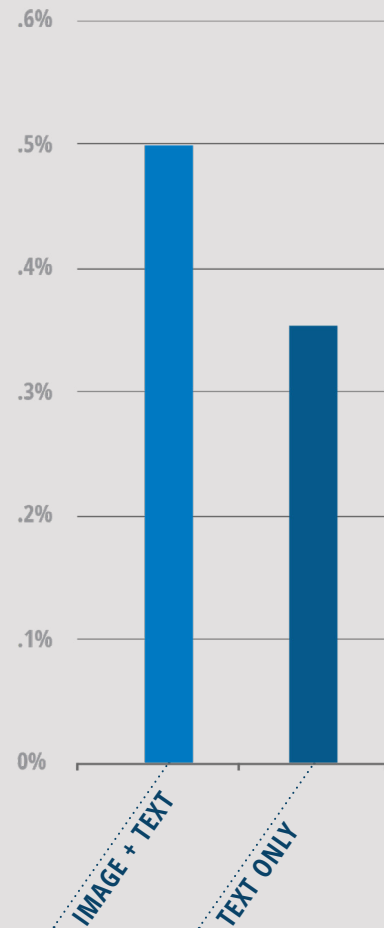Bar chart — y-axis: 0% to .6%. IMAGE + TEXT ≈ .5%, TEXT ONLY ≈ .35%

IMAGE + TEXT

FREE E-BOOK

The Evolution of Monitoring

Educators share how their use of monitoring has shifted over time to positively impact learning.

The Evolution of Monitoring: Educator Stories
As teachers open the web to learners, finding the balance between keeping learners safe and on task, and allowing learners' access and autonomy can be difficult. In this free e-book, four educators share their journeys with monitoring learning. **Download the e-book**.

ADVERTISEMENT

TEXT ONLY

How to Build a SOC on a Budget
Get all 5 chapters of AlienVault's How to Build a Security Operations Center (On a Budget) eBook to get an in-depth look at how organizations with limited resources can set up a successful security operations center for monitoring, detecting, containing, and remediating IT threats. **Download Now!**

ADVERTISEMENT

CHOOSING IMAGES

Advertisers use a wide variety of images to draw attention to their messaging. Commonly used image types include stock photos, text-based infographics, custom animations or, for ads promoting original content, cover art graphics.

While each image type can be effective alongside the right message, here are a few tips for maximizing image impact:

- **KEEP TEXT TO A MINIMUM** — Avoid crowding your images with unnecessary copy.

- **AVOID GENERIC STOCK PHOTOS** — Stand out from the crowd by avoiding overly-generic stock photos.

- **HIGHLIGHT SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS** — For event promotions, especially, consider spotlighting presenters and featuring headshots.

⚡ TIP 👁

Although readers are most likely to click on links within ad copy, images can drive performance by drawing attention to your message. Focus on bright colors and images of people or faces that will be eye-catching to the audience.

HEADLINES AND AD COPY

Making the most of limited space for ad copy can be a challenge. SmartBrief specs recommend 40 characters for your headline and 250 characters of body copy while native formats within social platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, are mostly limited to 200 or fewer combined characters.

Our data shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between ad copy length and click rate and that, while we generally encourage brevity, creatives with more characters tend to produce higher CTRs. With that in mind, we recommend making the most of the space available to you and targeting 250 characters for your ads.

SMARTBRIEF ADS BY THE NUMBERS

Average Headline character count:
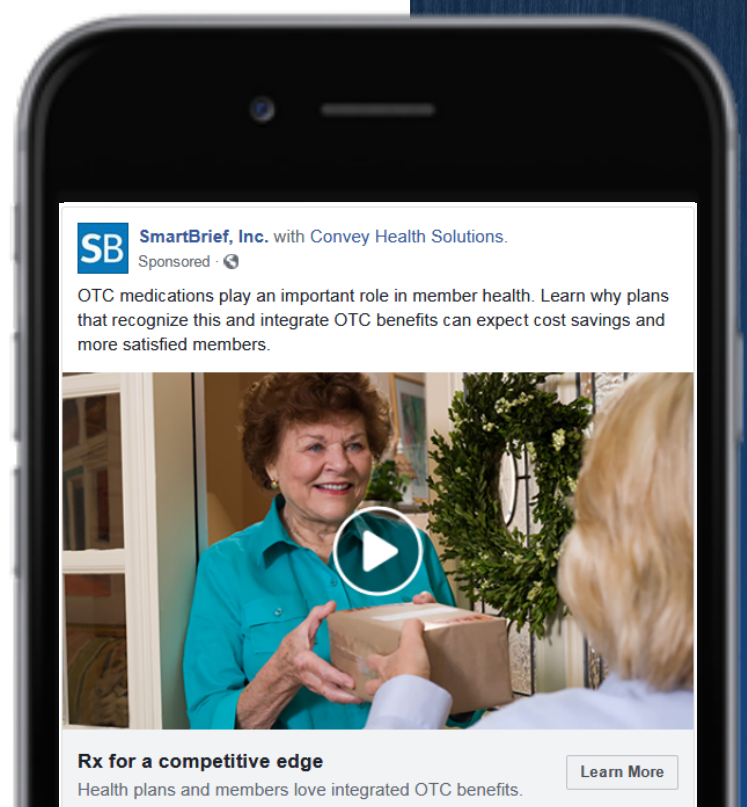
35.2

Average ad copy character count:

232.7

WINNING HEADLINES

- *How to Take Minutes at a Board Meeting*

- *Walnuts May Change How the Brain Responds to Hunger Cues*

- *91% of Millennials Buy Groceries Here*

- *Who Won Thanksgiving & Black Friday?*

- *The world's best drink campaigns*

- *6 Workplace Culture "Perks" Employees Care About Most*

- *Discover an effective survey design workflow*

- *Four Strategies to Thrive under Pressure*

- *Webinar: Planning for the Autonomous Age*

- *What to Do if Your Identity is Stolen?*

HEADLINES AND AD COPY

- **CLARITY IS KEY** — Set clear expectations for the reader. Make sure that your ad copy clearly communicates to the reader what you want them to do.

- **CONSIDER WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU CLICK** — When prepping your own copy, take a few minutes to review your go-to news outlets or scroll through your social feed for inspiration.

- **DETAILS ARE IMPORTANT** — Especially for live or web-based events, include the details — who is presenting and what are their credentials? When and where it will take place?

- **TAILOR YOUR MESSAGE TO THE AUDIENCE** — SmartBrief publishes more than 200 industry-specific newsletters across 15 verticals. Make sure that you're speaking the language of your intended audience and that your message addresses their unique needs.

- **WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE AUDIENCE?** Ultimately, the reader is less interested in your brand and more interested in what you can do to help them. Concentrate on telling the audience how your product can benefit them.

SB **SmartBrief, Inc.** with Convey Health Solutions.
Sponsored ·

OTC medications play an important role in member health. Learn why plans that recognize this and integrate OTC benefits can expect cost savings and more satisfied members.

Rx for a competitive edge
Health plans and members love integrated OTC benefits.
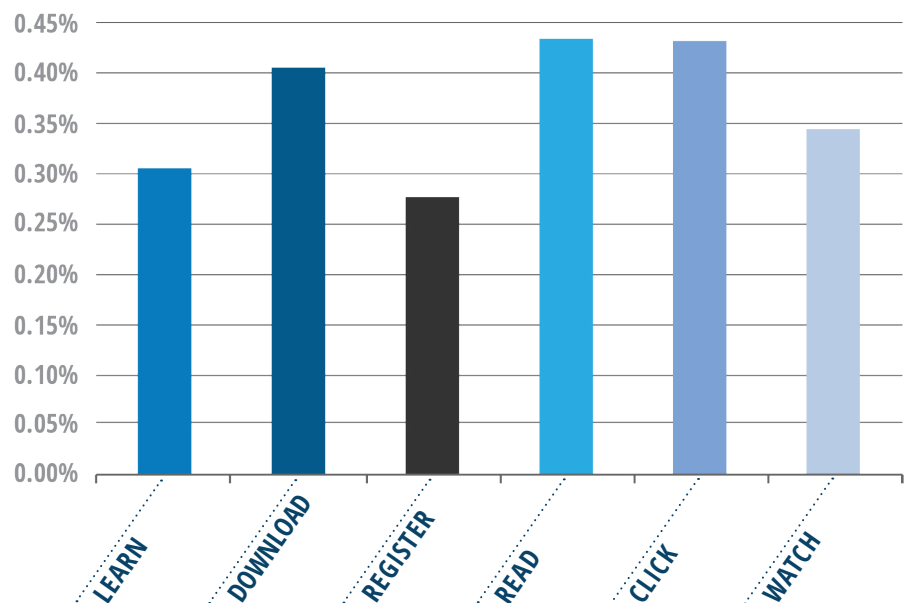
Learn More

CALL-TO-ACTION

Every ad should include a clear and concise call-to-action (CTA). We recommend placing your CTA at the end of your ad copy where it can serve as a natural prompt for readers to take the next step.

Although they vary widely, the most common CTAs tend to feature words like Download, Learn, Read, Register, Click or Watch.

High-performing ads often include Download or Read, while ads that featured the words Learn or Register tend to generate lower click rates.

⚡ **TIP** ➡

- **BE SPECIFIC** — Your ad is more likely to be successful if it includes a CTA that is direct and makes clear to the reader what will happen if he or she clicks. Download the eBook is likely to be much more effective than generic wording like *Learn More* or *Click Here.*

- **BE CONSISTENT** — To avoid confusion and present a seamless experience to your audience, utilize the same wording in your CTA as you do in your ad copy. If you refer to your content as a report in your ad copy, be sure to use the same phrasing in your CTA and landing page.

MONITOR, MEASURE, REFRESH

A/B TEST

One of the clearest takeaways from analyzing thousands
of prior ad placements is this: there is no magic formula
to creating a high-performing ad.

Ad interaction varies across different industries, mediums and
outlets, and it's not always easy to predict which combination
of image, headline, copy and CTA will perform best.

TIP

To maximize ad performance, test everything you can, as much as you can.

- **AD CREATIVE** — Performance is most-affected by graphics, headlines and
  calls-to-action, so be sure to focus your time where it counts.

- **CONTENT TYPES AND TOPICS** — Test multiple pieces of content
  to ensure that you're getting the best performance, and to confirm what types
  of content (white papers, case studies, webinars, infographics) resonate
  best with your audience.

- **USE A/B TESTS TO INFORM YOUR STRATEGY** — Use low-cost media
  to test so that you can maximize value of sponsorships and exclusives.

We want to hear from you
Share your thoughts on health care marketing trends and be
entered to win an Apple watch. Please take this short 4
minute survey on the state of marketing in the health care
industry. Your responses will be anonymous and confidential.
Start the Survey >

ADVERTISEMENT

Register Now: Crash Course in Real-time Advertising
June 3 - 10am PT/1pm ET
With the onset of programmatic buying and real-time media, it is
possible to run more targeted advertising than ever before. **Join
Quantcast media training specialist Jill Clark** to walk through
today's digital advertising landscape and explore how marketers
can leverage new technologies to drive the best performance and
ROI. Register here!

ADVERTISEMENT

SmartBrief Survey - Win an Apple Watch
Share your thoughts on health care marketing trends and be
entered to win an Apple watch. Please take this short 4
minute survey on the state of marketing in the health care
industry. Your responses will be anonymous and confidential.
Start the Survey >

ADVERTISEMENT

Real-time Advertising Academy
Webinar: Crash Course in Real-time Advertising
REGISTER HERE >

Register Now: Crash Course in Real-time Advertising
June 3 - 10am PT/1pm ET
With the onset of programmatic buying and real-time media,
it is possible to run more targeted advertising than ever
before. This webinar will provide marketers with a solid grasp
of the digital advertising landscape to effectively leverage
these new technologies to drive the best performance and
ROI. Register here!

ADVERTISEMENT

**Including a survey incentive in the ad headline
resulted in performance improvement of
nearly 125%.**

**By featuring a headshot image and highlighting
the presenter within ad copy, this advertiser
was able to boost CTRs by 50%.**

MONITOR, MEASURE, REFRESH

CREATIVE ROTATION

It's important to regularly rotate ad creatives and swap in new versions, as creatives will often begin to lose effectiveness within a few days or weeks after they are activated.

For sponsorships, creative fatigue can begin to impact performance quickly. Click rates tend to drop by 10-20% each successive time an ad creative is repeated.

AD PERFORMANCE (CTR) FOR REPEAT CREATIVES

TEXT ADS

LEADERBOARD ADS

NUMBER OF TIMES AD HAS RUN   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
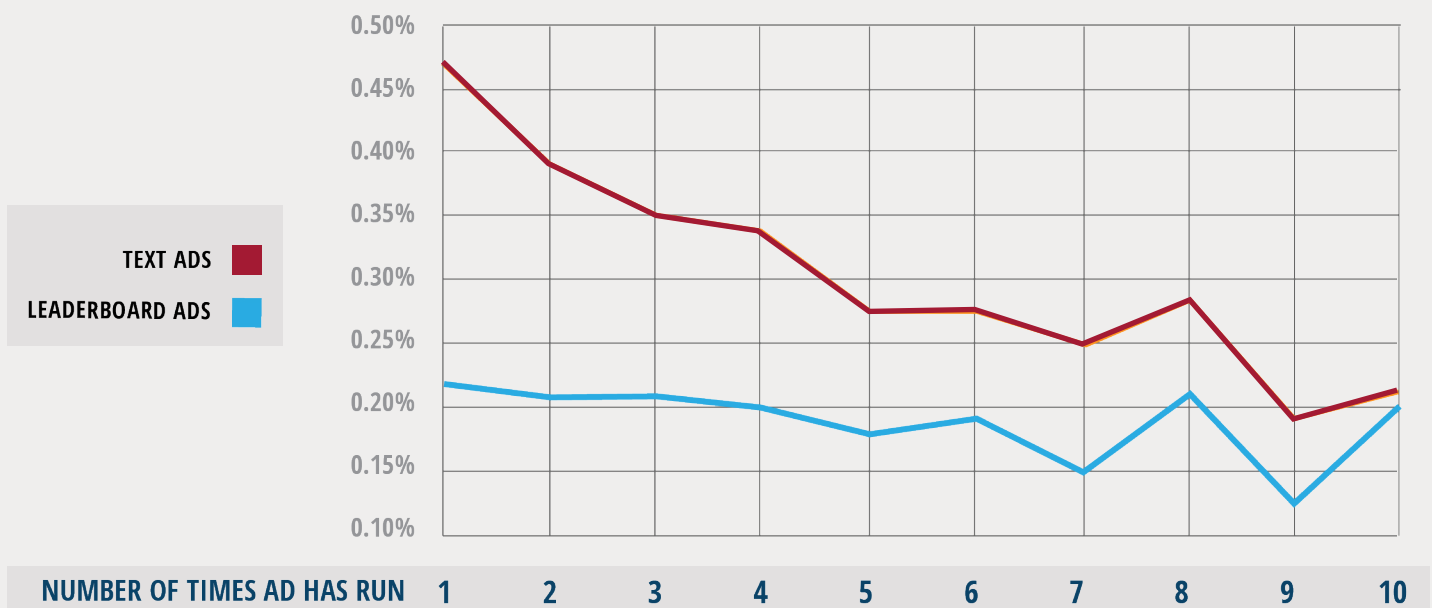
To maximize performance for sponsorships, consider rotating 2-3 different versions of creative and replacing the lowest performer after a few cycles.

For impression-based campaigns, we recommend utilizing at least 2-3 versions on your campaign start date. For flights lasting a month or longer, consider adding 1-2 new creatives every two weeks.

EMAIL SPONSORSHIPS

DEDICATED SENDS

Dedicated Sends, SmartBrief's exclusive HTML email product, are among our highest-performing ad types. Although these custom sends have wildly varied layouts and styles, there are a few tips advertisers can keep in mind to maximize success.

- **SUBJECT LINE** — The subject line makes your first impression and can have a major impact on open rate. Unless it's very short, your entire subject line may not appear fully on all devices, so communicate your most-pressing information early. We recommend limiting to 40-50 characters.

- **PREHEADERS** — Your preheader is an extension of the subject line. Include a preheader with every email to maximize your opportunity to hook the audience. What is a preheader?

- **VISUALS** — As with any ad format, include a strong and eye-catching graphic to encourage readers to engage with your message.

- **INCLUDE MULTIPLE PLACES TO CLICK** — Offer the reader multiple opportunities to click in order to maximize click rates. Include multiple links within your email copy and a clickable CTA "button" at the end of your message to drive home the point.
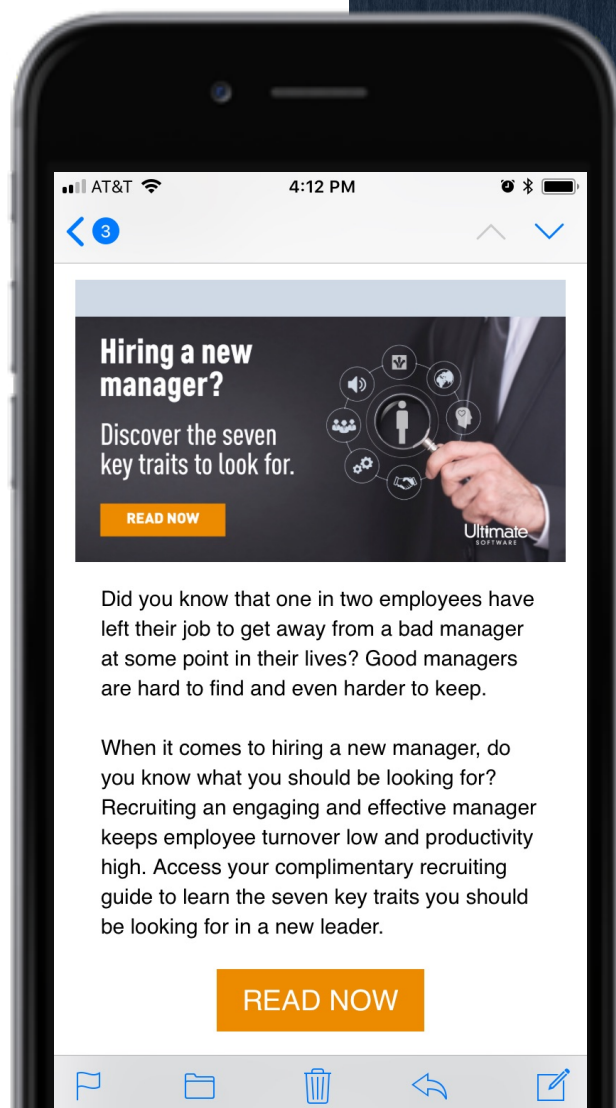
EMAIL SPONSORSHIPS

In addition to subject line, layout and email content, factors like send day and time can also affect open and click rates.

Most email marketers target Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday for email sends. However, our data shows relatively even open rates across the full work week, with Monday sends seeing the lowest performance.
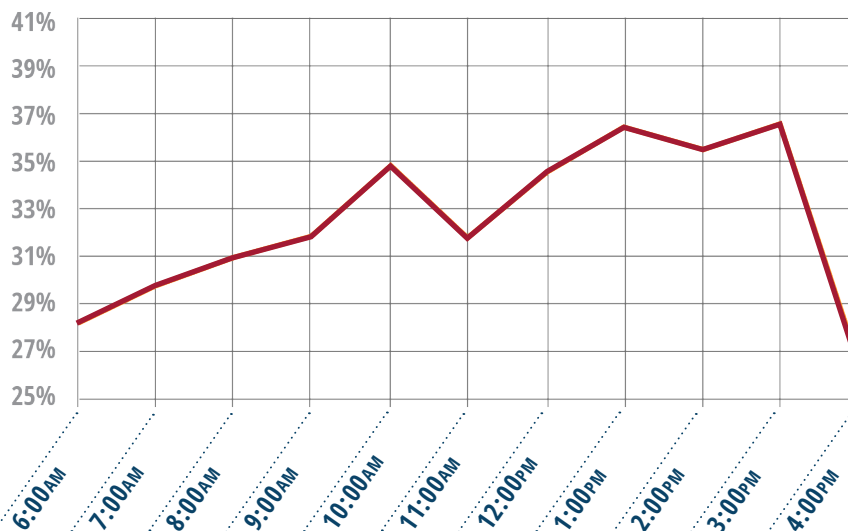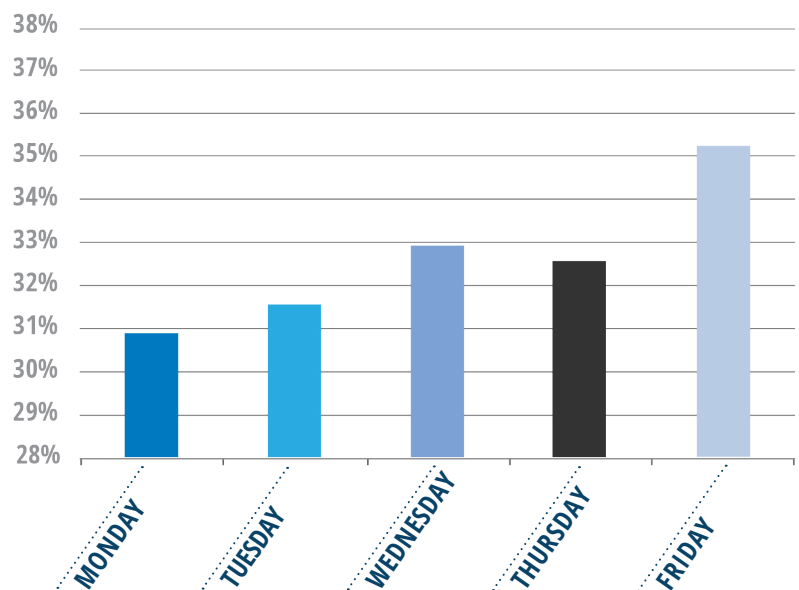
Across all SmartBrief dedicated emails, open rates are highest in the midmorning hours (10 - 11am ET) and just after lunchtime (1- 3pm ET), when readers on the east and west coasts are likely to be at their desks.

SmartBrief

A FUTURE COMPANY

SMARTBRIEF ADVERTISING

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FACEBOOK

TWITTER

LINKEDIN