

How Small Advertising Agencies Brand Themselves on the Web: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

Marketing communication agencies are in the business of branding other companies. In the current media landscape, ad agencies need to demonstrate their communication expertise through the Internet including their homepages. This pilot study collected data and user impressions on the websites of 42 randomly selected small advertising agencies. Companies with 10 or fewer employees were of specific interest because of the limited resources they bring to the competitive process. We used content analysis to compare the studied sites with validated criteria for quality websites in seven categories. These areas addressed design, navigation, technology, functionality and content. The content areas concerned reputation, relationship-building opportunities and distinctive branding features. Researchers found mixed results concerning the key branding elements of clarity, competence and credibility, distinctive personality, and demonstrations of expertise. There seems to be room for small ad agencies to improve the way they brand themselves through their websites. The conference presentation shares preliminary findings on how well agencies did at validating their credentials, building relationships, and communicating clearly. Recommendations are offered.

Keywords: branding, branding elements, corporate image, credibility, digital branding, differentiation, message clarity, small advertising agencies, unique selling personality, unique selling proposition, USP

Biography

Martine Robinson Beachboard is an Associate Professor at the James E. Rogers Department of



Communication, Media & Persuasion at Idaho State University, USA. She teaches journalism, advertising, writing, and mass communication and society. Dr. Beachboard previously taught with the University of Maryland European Division. She has published in the areas of international and intercultural journalism. Her research has appeared in *Research in Higher Education* and in the *Journal of Advertising Education*. Her professional career experience was in journalism and university public relations. She is a member of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and the American Advertising Federation. She is faculty advisor to students participating in the annual AAF National Student Advertising Competition.