

What happens when you abandon all principles of design and get weird?

Article

The “Mad Men” approach of finding the perfect slogan and polished copy isn’t gospel. For some, we’re now in the era of unpolished content, disruptive formatting, and what TotalRetail is calling “**weirdvertising**.” These ads take the basic idea of **memeification** found on social media and extend it to other forms of display advertising, including out-of-home (OOH) and print.

What is weirdvertising? We're using this term to refer to any ad that probably shouldn't work but does, be that by highlighting their intentionally lower quality (like [cereal company Surreal's billboards](#)) or causing confusion (like [MoonPie's alien ads](#)). These ads abandon some basic design and advertising principles in exchange for gaining attention.

What are the features of weirdvertising?

- Doesn't follow basic design principles of contrast, balance, and unity
- Features unpopular fonts like Comic Sans and inconsistent typefaces
- May include nostalgic media like Clip Art and WordArt
- Appears self-aware of its supposed faux pas

Weirdvertising can take the form of video, too. [Duolingo has been doing this](#) with its mascot, Duo. [Scrub Daddy has made similar videos](#), also featuring Duo. And those video features aren't exactly new. [Quiznos was making weird ads featuring the Spongmonkeys](#) back in 2004.

But what is new is the way weirdvertising has extended beyond social media. Ads like the ones from Surreal and MoonPie have taken popular, memeified content, and amplified it into the real world via OOH and print ads.



Source: Surreal via Instagram

Why does weirdvertising work? Weirdvertising may abandon some design principles, but it doesn't actually abandon all marketing principles. The ads still feature basic brand info, and they're true to brand identity. For instance, this weird ad format probably wouldn't work for a luxury brand, but it does for a younger, more accessible brand.

The ads are relatable, giving the feel that anyone could have made or thought of them. They're often nostalgic through the use of vintage Microsoft Word tools like Clip Art and WordArt. And they can be funny, attention-grabbing, and recognizable.

While weirdvertisements signal a brand's coolness and relevance, there is certainly risk associated with the ads. They leverage confusion for engagement, which could result in upset viewers. And they spark conversations, which brands then lose some control over.

But more than anything, these ads read as authentic and self-aware. Weirdvertisements are a good choice for the right brand—so long as that brand is skewed toward a younger audience, accessible, and works with creatives who are plugged into greater cultural trends and conversations.

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