



6080 Center Drive, Suite 450, Los Angeles, CA 90045  
310.337.0100 | [solutions@phaseone.net](mailto:solutions@phaseone.net)

## Secrets of Highly Clickable Online Ads

Presented at the annual meeting of the Advertising Research Foundation, March 6, 2001

George Perlove, Sr. VP for the Ad Council

Terry Villines, Sr. VP of PhaseOne Communications

In 2001, PhaseOne Communications teamed up with the Ad Council to learn what drives internet surfers to click on ads embedded in a website. The Ad Council was using internet advertising for a number of campaigns, but finding declining click-through rates; sometimes as few as .1% of ad viewers clicked on the ads.

The internet is a unique marketing environment. Previous studies have demonstrated that although many of the time-honored communications principles apply to banner ads, there are some new principles that must be applied due to the internet's unique consumer control.

PhaseOne Communications analyzed 93 current Public Service Announcement (PSA) internet ads from 23 different organizations. Click-through rates ranged from .03% to 1.22%. Each ad was coded using PhaseOne Communications' proprietary analytical methods. Multivariate correlation analyses revealed four factors to be highly associated with click-through rates ( $R = .66$ ,  $R^2 = .44$ ). These four factors account for 44% of the variance in how likely consumers are to click on banner ads.

### Highly clickable ads do the following:

**Engage the Eye:** The internet is a crowded place. Ads must contain visual features that capture audiences' attention. The most effective are motion and high contrast.

**Engage the Mind:** Once consumers glance at ads, there must be something there to hold their attention. Our analyses identified two paths to engaging the mind: one through the head and one through the heart. Effective routes through the mind include arousing curiosity and tapping into the familiar. Effective routes through the heart include positive emotional appeal and imagery. Negative appeals and negative images were found to be ineffective.

**Create a Desire for More:** As soon as the mind is engaged, it is essential to create a desire for more information. One effective way to do this is to tell a relevant story that prompts consumers to click-through to learn the story's conclusion. The story will be particularly effective if it conveys a difference from other products and a benefit to the reader. Self-

contained messages and banner ads that are too ambitious in their messages get low click-through rates.

**Facilitate Action:** To ensure consumers take that last step and click on the ad, the ad should ask for that click, and should make it easy to do. Something as simple as adding “click for details” could serve this function.