

## Does That Work?

John Hanks, DC

When I travel to another city, I always read the chiropractic ads in the Yellow Pages. Many years ago, this was an entertaining, yet painful pursuit, since frankly, many ads were embarrassing to the profession. In 1924, a professor at the Palmer College, Harry Vedder, DC, wrote a book, *Chiropractic Advertising*, the purpose of which was to show chiropractors how to "tastefully" advertise. Apparently, his efforts failed miserably.

Perhaps I'm being too critical, but I have seen some ads that were real humdingers. I remember the guy from Pennsylvania who had a newspaper ad showing him in his graduation cap and gown, stating he was giving out free fried chicken at his open house. Then there was the business card I saw years ago, showing a cartoon cowboy wearing an enormous, tall cowboy hat. Listed on the hat were the diseases he said he could treat, from "A to Z" (asthma to "zits," in this case).

Things are better now - or are they? Advertising is usually not "in-your-face stupid" these days, but when I look at some of the Yellow Pages and newspaper ads - I just don't get it. I mean, I have no idea if some of these ads are effective or not.

For instance, take the strategy of using the "S-word" (subluxation) in advertising. In one city, I came across a clinic called "Subluxations, Etc." I thought to myself, "Does this work? Do people come in because of this name?" I wondered if the doctors treat some kind of "boutique" subluxation, or maybe sell "subluxation accessories" - whatever they might be. My impression was that a clinic called Monkey Shine Chiropractic would be just as effective. But what do I know?

What about slogans? A couple of years ago, I saw a banner outside an office that read, "Got Subluxation?" - an obvious take-off on the "Got Milk?" ad campaign. Does this work? Do people come in demanding to find out if they have a subluxation crawling around inside of them? Last year, our Canadian colleagues found out that a public relations campaign that attempted to educate people about subluxations resulted in an increase in visits to medical doctors (not chiropractors), by people wanting to know if they had this disease.

But, back to the Yellow Pages. Use of the word "life" seems to be popular in ads. I have found clinics called Life Within; More Life; New Life; and Café of Life, which I can only assume does not actually serve food. One office, called Inner Life Balance, proudly announced that it specialized in auto accident injuries. Does that work?

To reassure potential patients, some ads offer "gentle techniques." Gentle - as opposed to what? "Bone-shattering" manipulation? Rib-splitting, lung-collapsing adjustments? I once had a new patient tell me that he intentionally steered away from offices that used the word "gentle" in their Yellow Page ads. "I'm a big guy," he said. "I didn't think that sissy stuff would move anything on my back!"

Jockeying for first position in the Yellow Pages is an exercise in the letter "A" (or "AAA Chiropractic," in many cases). Does this work? Why not just call your office AAA Aardvark Chiropractic? And how do doctors give hints in their ads on directions to the office? "Right behind

the abortion clinic" is probably not a socially neutral mental map. Or, how about the street your office is on? Austin, Texas, on Slaughter Street. Slaughter Chiropractic? Would that work?

I have never been smart about advertising. I never have understood what works. As in politics, my endorsement is usually the kiss of death. I am the world's unluckiest gambler, and consequently, when in Las Vegas for a seminar, I no longer put even one quarter in a slot machine. So, my observations on advertising are definitely colored by my naiveté. However, I have never been able to get that cap, gown and free fried chicken out of my mind, because ... maybe that worked!

*John Hanks, DC*  
*Denver, Colorado*  
[jwhanksdc@earthlink.net](mailto:jwhanksdc@earthlink.net)

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