HOW ENGINEERING JOBS ARE ADVERTISED

Gerald Sang'udi

[Assignment: Discuss an advertising technique showing its use in constructing ads. You might write about the function of wordplay or "snob appeal". Your paper will be more effective if you can identify the intended audience. You are encouraged to come up with your own terms to define a particular technique.]

(1) As soon as he graduates from college, the opportunity-seizing engineer will enter heaven. With support from his employers, with "state of the art" technological facilities at his disposal, and with his concentration on engineering ensured by a "competitive salary" and comfortable living conditions, he will envision, design, and develop a technological breakthrough. But only if he goes to work for certain companies. Or so these companies' ads claim. Indeed, companies seeking to attract young engineers use some very effective techniques in their ads, techniques that emphasize a variety of themes or appeals.

(2) By far the most popular theme is technology. The high tech appeal seeks to impress upon the reader that the company running the ad is at the forefront of technology. One ad declares its subject "The most advanced technological company in the world." A more modest ad says "To stay in touch with technology, get in touch with Texas Instruments." Some advertisers even restrict their entire ad to the high tech message. Two ads describe Westinghouse as "The Technological Think Tank" and "The Technological Lighthouse" respectively, then go on only to justify the descriptions. Other advertisers point out that they do not just have the technology; they pass it on to their new engineers. Motorola Inc. for one will "put [the engineer] to work on the world's most advanced electronics technologies. NOW.

(3) These bold claims to high tech are backed by vivid images, usually set against black backgrounds. Depending on whether an ad is meant to attract aerospace, chemical, electronics, software, or other engineers, it may depict a space shuttle, jet fighter, laboratory, computer terminal, etc. For instance, a General Motors ad for automobile engineers features a brightly colored, liquid crystal shutter display for the "concept car."

(4) Another popular appeal, world of opportunities, works especially well for multi-national corporate giants because it is developed most convincingly by an advertiser with many branches all over the world and room for career mobility. The image-slogan combinations in this technique can be particularly effective. One black-and-white ad shows the earth in space and reads: "At Mobil, we could even say that the sky's the limit. But then again, we wouldn't want to hold you back." A somewhat less sophisticated ad declares that [the
engineer] "doesn't have to change companies to change career paths at Texas Instruments," and the three young engineers scanning the TI intra-company weekly, Job Opportunities Bulletin show why.

(5) "Opportunities" can also mean openings for advances within a single career. Pratt & Whitney tells the engineer, "It's your time to climb. Take your career farther faster. . . ." For illustration, two supersonic jets ascend vertically in the background. Similarly, the engineer is called to "rise and shine" with Olin, Inc. like the glowing satellite orbiting the earth.

(6) The innovation and competition appeal is one of a series of overlapping appeals which stresses what the engineer must bring to the company. The ads using it are quick to point out that the company will not spoonfeed the engineer. A Data General Corporation ad explains how "the fiery spirit of competition forces [the company] to have two or more teams competing to develop the same product." The engineer must stay on his toes to survive in such an environment. At one company, "a breakthrough is guaranteed to happen," and the engineer had better be involved in it. The only comfort is that "Nothing [the engineer] says is crazy. Even crazy ideas produce technological revolutions."

(7) For the engineer who wants to and actually can lead, the leadership appeal lays emphasis on the administrative responsibility and leadership role associated with a job. Pacific Bell is "Where born leaders belong." Leaders only, like the young man pictured in the center of the ad, the well-dressed one with the expensive briefcase, "belong" at the company but are not made there; non-leaders apparently are not welcome.

(8) The third appeal which states the advertiser's expectations and demands is the challenge appeal. It is really an extension of the previous two, with a few slight differences. First of all, the word "challenge" is always displayed conspicuously in the slogan. Secondly, the appeal emphasizes that the engineer will have to dedicate a lot of time and effort to her job, regardless of her abilities. "General Electric hires people who have that extra push" and "give the job their best." The US Army wonders if sharpening pencils (of all things) is what other employers mean by "all the challenge you can handle," and it assures the reader that its challenge is a real challenge.

(9) An extreme version of the challenge appeal is the brain enough? appeal. The technique of suggesting that the reader probably is not good enough for a company often strikes a sensitive chord with ambitious, self-confident engineers, so that companies that can afford to wait for the "crème de la crème" use it to their
advantage. McDonnell Douglas Astronautics is "searching for a few bright stars . . ." Booz, Allen and Hamilton Inc. question the engineer: "Are you our type? If you're one of the rarest . . ." Another company, Bell South, "is recruiting the best to work with the best."

(10) The imagery in the brain enough? appeal is often very abstract. It sometimes consists of a crystal, an equation-laden chalkboard, or just black emptiness. When it is more concrete it can be a brain, an eye (sometimes emitting a light ray for "vision"), a head, or a "whiz kid" working wonders. All these images have a very sober, very serious tone; their colors are not very bright (gray is quite popular), and the faces never smile.

(11) Of all the themes and appeals, the most personal is that of the common future. Some advertisers clearly admit their dependency on the engineer, and they use their expression of need to assert that they are very supportive and appreciative of him because they need to keep him. This technique regularly uses what Ann McClintock has called "testimonials." Perhaps the best examples are Boeing's "soft touch" ads. The slogans read: "A Word About Your Future. And Ours. From One of Our Experts." An honest young engineer narrates his success story and describes his love affair with a company that acknowledges his worth. Then he invites you to join him at work.

(12) Finally, some ads mention, but never highlight, the money factor. "Competitive salaries" is a phrase that is often slipped into the details at the bottom of the ad. The advertiser's hope is that once an engineer has been attracted by a fancy, catchy slogan and is reading through the details, the lure of "competitive salaries" will confirm her interest in the job. An example is a Wang ad that pictures a personal computer and says, "Don't be fooled into thinking that this is an ad." When the reader searches the page to find out why it is not an ad, the repeated mention of attractive salaries works its way into her mind.

(13) The advertising of engineering jobs, then, is by no means a matter of public notices and announcements. The jobs must be packaged and marketed to a targeted readership, and successful results require the most artful application of wordplay and imagery in the presentation of a variety of magnetic appeals. As an engineer might say, it is a task that demands carefully structured design and development based on the application of scientific principles.