

What If The Target Audience Doesn't Get The Yellow Pages?

■ As it turns out, it probably won't make any difference

By Dan O'Day

I presented a radio-advertising seminar at this year's NAB Convention, and an attendee stumped me with what seemed, at the time, to be a very tough question.

This attendee had sat patiently through my ranting about foolish retail advertisers that waste their time giving their phone numbers in their



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local radio commercials. I said, "For most local retail advertisers, giving their phone number in their commercial is a complete waste of time. That's because your listeners have two things at home and in their offices: a telephone and a phone book."

This attendee explained, however, that his station serves a Hispanic audience in a large American city. Most of the station's listeners do not read English. Therefore, he explained, they cannot look up the phone number of an advertiser in their local telephone directory. There is a Hispanic Yellow Pages available in his city, but few members of his audience use it.

"They can't look up a local advertiser in the phone book," he said, "because most of them can't read the English phone book" — which is automatically delivered as part of their phone service — "and they don't know about the Hispanic Yellow Pages. So what are we supposed to do to make sure listeners can call the advertisers?"

After much thought, I said, "I've never been asked that question before, and at the moment I don't have an answer. But if you'll give me your card after the seminar, I promise I'll think about it and get back to you with an answer."

Perception changes with perspective. At the time, I thought I was doing a very good job of presenting that seminar. I was awake, alert, well-prepared, feeling good. According to the NAB, the reviews for that session were very positive. Afterward, lots of people approached me to say how much they learned from it.

But, in hindsight, I realized the horrible truth: I blew it. Because I already knew the answer. In fact, I had shared the answer during the seminar.

After pointing out that listeners have telephone books, I added that for most local retail businesses, the listener has absolutely no desire to call them. Why are they going to call,

say, a shoe store? To ask if it carries shoes? Are they going to call the bank to ask if it's true that it offers a free safe-deposit box with each new account?

Here's how I should have answered the question:

1. For most local retail advertisers (which is what the seminar focused on), listeners don't need to be able to find the phone number, because they don't want to call the store.

2. The majority of non-English-speaking Hispanic residents of a large city are invariably concentrated in one or two specific neighborhoods. (Remember, I'm not talking about all or most Hispanics; I'm talking about Hispanics who live in large American cities and who don't speak English.) Rather than advertise the phone number of a retail establish-

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ment in their area, tell the listeners where the business is located: "on Pico Boulevard, just west of Sepulveda" or "on Main Street, across from the post office."

At the NAB Convention I allowed myself to be stymied by a question that was founded on the fallacy that it is important to get those phone numbers to those Spanish-speaking listeners. I should have repeated my remarks about how wasteful phone numbers are in most local retail commercials.

Again, note the disclaimer "most local retail commercials." If the "call to action" in the commercial — that is, "Come to the store," "Test-drive the vehicle" or "Sign up for the department store's guest registry" — does not involve calling the advertiser, forget about including or referring to the phone number.

If, however, to take advantage of the call to action the listener must call the advertiser (in which case it's literally a "call" to action), then, of

course, you need to include the phone number.

Educate Clients About Radio Copy

But if you're a copywriter and you write a local spot that doesn't include a phone number, you'll get yelled at by the account executive. That's because if your station or agency produces a local spot that doesn't include a phone number, the account executive will get yelled at by the advertiser. Why? Because the phone number is in the newspaper ad. That's where you need to educate the advertiser:

"Well, of course your phone number is in your newspaper ad. That's because they have to fill up all that white space. So, they fill it up with all kinds of factual information: your phone number, address, business hours, maybe even a map to your store.

"A newspaper ad is perfectly fine for giving cold, hard, factual information, but it cannot do what a good radio commercial can do: make people want to buy your product. If you're a restaurant, your newspaper ad can reprint your menu. But a radio commercial can make people hungry for your food! Now, if newspapers could do that, don't you think they would? But they can't — and we can!

"Let us make your targeted consumers want to come to your restaurant, and let the newspaper provide them with any cold, hard, factual information they might want after we've convinced them to become customers."

Listeners who don't understand English don't read English-language newspapers, but they do read Spanish-language papers, and most of your advertisers who target Hispanic people advertise in those papers.

Ultimate question: What will your Spanish-speaking listeners do when, for some reason, they do want to contact a local business?

Ultimate answer: They'll do whatever they usually do when they want a local business' phone number. They'll call directory assistance (a city with a large Hispanic population undoubtedly offers bilingual directory assistance). They'll ask a friend to look it up in their phone book. Whatever it is they normally do is what they will do then too.

One note regarding the Hispanic Yellow Pages: Not all Spanish-

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speaking businesses will be in that directory. It's probably published not by the local telephone company, but by a third party. And even if it is published by the phone company, it's not their "core" directory, the one that lists virtually all businesses. (If someone has a business phone number in your city, that business automatically receives a listing in the core directory.)

A Hidden Opportunity

That attendee also incidentally identified a potentially very profitable source of new on-air ad revenue: He should be going to the publishers of the Hispanic Yellow Pages and selling them a massive, long-term schedule:

"When you're looking for a Spanish-speaking business in your neighborhood, you'll find it in the

Rather than advertise the phone number of a retail establishment in their area, tell the listeners where the business is located.

Hispanic Yellow Pages. We'll send you a free copy if you just give us a call at this number: 555-8111. The Hispanic Yellow Pages — where local businesses speak your language."

He should also encourage the Hispanic Yellow Pages to offer co-op advertising money for businesses that advertise in the book and on the radio station. Two examples:

1. The Hispanic Yellow Pages offers to pay 5% of the cost of any commercial schedule on the station that includes the words "Look for us in the Hispanic Yellow Pages!"

2. The Hispanic Yellow Pages offers to pay 5% of the cost of any commercial schedule on the station that includes the words "Look for us in the Hispanic Yellow Pages," and the station agrees to discount quali-

fying ads by another 5%. A local company that advertises with both the station and the phone book will instantly save 10%.

By "qualifying ads," I mean the station may want to require some minimum level of investment or length of campaign. Or maybe not; I'm just making this up as I go along.

But such an arrangement would make a lot of sense to the publishers of the Hispanic Yellow Pages. Although they have distribution in the city, they lack penetration. By the attendee's account, most of his Spanish-speaking listeners do not have the directory.

This combined campaign — one promoting the Hispanic Yellow Pages, the other encouraging other advertisers to promote the Hispanic Yellow Pages — will increase both awareness and penetration (assuming that it's easy for listeners to obtain the Hispanic Yellow Pages).

So the Hispanic Yellow Pages establishes its brand with its advertising and offers an immediate-response vehicle — the telephone number — for listeners to obtain the book. The Hispanic Yellow Pages gets promoted on-air by all those local advertisers, greatly increasing its brand awareness.

Advertisers targeting Spanish-speaking Hispanics get a genuine discount, so they save money on their advertising or, even better, make their ad budget go further. Because only one station offers this co-op program, that station gets its "unfair share" of each ad dollar spent by those businesses. Everybody wins. (Except its competitors. Too bad. They should have read this article.)

Oh, and did you notice that in this case I'm strongly suggesting that the attendee give a phone number in the spot for the Hispanic Yellow Pages? That's because the desired result of such a campaign is to place as many phone books as possible in Spanish-speaking homes. To do that, the station needs to make it as easy as possible for the target audience to get the book. And the easiest way for the audience to get it should be by calling a local or toll-free number to request a copy.

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