

DAN O'DAY'S COMMERCIAL COPY MAKEOVER

THE WORST THING EVER TO HAPPEN TO COMMERCIAL RADIO

By Dan O'Day



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O'DAY

The worst thing that ever happened to the radio advertising business was when some fool labeled the people in charge of crafting advertising campaigns "creative." Because advertising is not an exercise in creativity; it's mass salesmanship.

You don't need to be creative in order to create radio commercials that will make money for your clients. You just need to know how to use a commercial to sell. You need to understand

what motivates people to buy.

The Radio-Mercury Awards felt obliged to add a radio station-produced category — suggesting that without being given their own category in which to compete, radio station-produced spots have little or no chance of winning. (That's not the *intention* of that category, which was designed to stimulate more excellent commercial production in-station.)

And there are two other reasons the Radio-Mercury people believe station-produced spots need their own safe category. Let's examine those reasons.

1. They think radio stations are handicapped when it comes to creating commercials.

Well, they are — partly because they often don't have the resources needed to create the kinds of commercials that win national awards.

But local radio stations are also handicapped because the people who create their in-house commercials usually have absolutely no education in advertising. I see ads in the trades all the time: "Production director wanted, must know ProTools." I never see ads that say, "Must be a master of advertising."

Most radio-station production and creative directors do not know the fundamentals of advertising. They haven't studied advertising. They haven't been given or gone out and gotten an advertising education. They have never read David Ogilvy or Robert Collier or Claude Hopkins or Max Sackheim. They're like doctors who never attended medical school and practice based on knowledge they pick up from medical journals and by talking to other doctors at medical conventions. The typical production director knows how to use the electronic toys but does not know that advertising equals mass salesmanship.

Local radio stations are also handicapped because so few station managers care about the products they sell. A station owner-manager once told me it's stupid to invest in training for the people who actually create radio commercials because, in her words, "Radio is a sales-driven business."

And that's the problem! If you see radio as a sales-driven business, then you pour all your resources into putting as many salespeople on the street as possible. If your station invests in training, it invests only in sales training: prospecting, cold-calling, getting past the gatekeeper, overcoming objections, closing techniques, etc.

But let's do the math: You've got more salespeople on the street, so you should be making more sales than you used to. And you give the salespeople all sorts of sales training. You send them to seminars and conferences, and you buy them books and videotapes to help them sell better. So you have more salespeople, and they're selling more because of the continuing sales training you give them.

So you must have an ever-growing client base, right?

I mean, all these salespeople out there on the street every day, using their finely honed sales skills — your active client base must be bursting at the seams. I assume you're 100% sold out, the law of supply and demand has practically forced you to keep raising your rates, and you don't have room for any new clients. Right?

Why not?

Attrition. Yesterday's clients are not today's clients. Today's clients will not be tomorrow's clients. Why? Because they're not getting the results they need to justify the expense of advertising with you. Because, for too many of them, advertising is an expense, rather than an investment. Because their local station sees radio as sales-driven, rather than results-driven.

2. Some of their judges don't know how to judge radio commercials.

The Radio-Mercury Awards judges invariably give awards to commercials that entertain, not sell. It was David Ogilvy who said, "Don't tell me you like my ad. Tell me you bought the product."

A successful commercial is not one that wins awards. It's not even one that the client likes. How can I say that? If the client likes it, that's all that matters, right? Wrong. If you go to the doctor with a physical problem, you might be pleased with what he prescribes for you. But if you drop dead from your ailment three months later, I wouldn't describe that as a successful treatment.

Your clients come to you with business problems to solve. Your job isn't to give them commercials they like, it's to create campaigns that solve their problems and let their businesses live long enough to advertise with you again and again and again.

Someone asked me, "So you're against entertainment in commercials?" Absolutely not. I'm against entertainment that is irrelevant to the sales process. The model most people follow when creating commercials, including most award-winning commercials, is: I'll do a little song and dance and entertain them, and then I'll try to sell them something.

And it used to work that way. A hundred years ago, some guy would show up in a new town, set up his table and launch into a juggling routine or a magic act. A crowd would gather. Then the entertainer would go to the back of the tent, and the snake-oil salesman would come out and deliver his finely crafted and well-rehearsed sales pitch.

They sold an awful lot of snake oil that way, but that's not how it works with electronic-media advertising in the 21st century.

A question for sales managers: Do you instruct your account executives to conduct sales calls by telling 27 jokes and then asking, "Do you want to buy some commercials?" If you entertain in a commercial, the entertainment has to be inextricably woven into the sales message. You should not be able to remove the entertainment without removing the sales message itself.

That's a very easy and extremely effective test to apply to your commercials: Is it possible to remove the entertaining elements without removing the sales message?

All too often, the answer is yes. I've lost count of the number of award-winning commercials that won those awards because of their entertainment value, even though you could have replaced the product or service being advertised with practically any other product or service without touching the entertainment.

Effective radio advertising works like this:

1. Identify a desire that will be fulfilled or a problem that will be solved by your client's product or service.
2. Show the consumer how you can fulfill his desire or solve her problem.
3. Deliver your message in a way that involves the listener.
4. Make sure your message is absolutely clear. Which, among other things, means not allowing anything in the

IDENTIFYING A NEED

For a couple of years now, my office manager has tried to convince me to buy TiVo, a device that digitally records television programs onto a hard drive. Robyn (my office manager) has it and loves it.

"It will record any program for you," she says.

"My VCR does that," I reply.

"Yes, but then you can watch whatever it's recorded whenever you want," she says.

"Same with my VCR," I say.

"You don't understand," she wails. "It completely changes your television-viewing experience."

And that's exactly why I haven't been interested in TiVo. I have no desire to change my television-viewing experience. My television-viewing experience is not a problem to me.

A few weeks ago I had lunch with a friend, Ken. He'd just gotten TiVo.

"So," I ventured, "what's it like?"

"Oh, it's great! It completely changes your television-viewing experience!"

Here we go again.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I never have to channel-surf anymore," said Ken.

"So you used to just sit there with the remote control, trying to stumble on something to watch?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "What I mean is that now, whenever I turn on the TV there's always something I want to watch."

Hmm. Have you ever had the problem of feeling like watching TV but not finding anything worth viewing?

I think maybe I'll get TiVo.

commercial that distracts from that single, clear message.

5. Drive home that message again and again, using one of radio's greatest strengths: frequency.

Who creates the best radio advertising? Someone who understands advertising in general and radio advertising in particular, and someone who gives a damn.

Your clients are not just advertisers. They are people with dreams. Perhaps one of your clients dreamed of building safe, comfortable homes for people with modest incomes. Another arrived in this country with the dream of opening her own restaurant and sharing her grandmother's recipes with people in her new homeland. Someone else dreamed of helping children overcome the kind of learning disabilities that made his childhood so miserable.

Sure, sometimes — maybe often — they're a pain in the neck. But they are human beings with dreams, and they have entrusted their dreams to you.

Do you have a dream of your own, something you hope to accomplish before you die? Do you want to entrust your dream to someone who's going to scribble something down on the back of an envelope and then forget all about you and your dream?

No, I don't dislike salespeople or creativity or entertainment. I dislike anyone who promises to help make another person's dream come true without having the ability, time, training or motivation to deliver on that promise.

This column is excerpted from *The Dan O'Day Radio Advertising Letter*. For your free e-mail subscription, send your request to: danoday@danoday.com with "R&R Ad Request" in the subject line, or subscribe online at www.danoday.com.