

A face for radio

Radio advertising has its own challenges. Pretty faces and stunning photography just don't work in radio. The spoken word is key. And the spoken word must break through tons of clutter. Just how do you differentiate your speaking voice from the radio station's on-air personalities? How do you communicate figures, facts and numbers without the benefit of a visual? In short, it takes a really good copywriter and some great voice actors to create a memorable radio commercial.

This struck home the other day as I was driving in South Florida, where one drives A LOT. Thus, one is one's car, with the radio on generally, for long stretches of time. I heard a commercial for AT&T Wireless. It was about getting a cell phone for Mother's Day, but warning kids that Moms don't always understand texting. It was funny and it struck a chord about the differences between generations. It was clever and it got my attention...a very difficult job when one can change channels in seconds. In this case, you had to remember that the advertiser was ATT (not Verizon or Sprint). Thus the commercial had to both draw you in, and repeat key information.

The other problem that radio advertising faces is ability to act (or rather inability to act). If you are home, watching TV, and you see something interesting, you can write down a phone number or a website, and immediately call or visit. In radio, you are most likely out and about, without access to a pen or a computer. So the commercial must strike a chord and then be so memorable that when you get home you will remember the name of the advertiser and look it up. Of course, with political advertising, you just have to remember the name. In this realm, radio advertising is very effective. You can be repetitious and through frequency, make sure potential voters know your name and a few of your ideas.

The debate in radio advertising is (at least in media buying departments of ad agencies) of reach versus frequency. The answer of course is to find the best balance of both, but I think in the cluttered world of radio, you need to aim for frequency.