

Radio Face Part 2

It has become commonplace to use celebrity voice-overs for television and radio ads. In fact, I remember reading that it had become a kind of game to identify who the celebrity was. For instance, I am pretty sure Ann Curry does the Detrol ads. And I just heard a radio commercial for Kaiser Permanente, which I am almost certain was read by Allison Janney. Which brings me to my point: is it worth the money to have a highly-paid (and probably telegenic) celebrity do a voice-over for your radio commercial? Of course, voices, like faces, can connote emotions and create associations. Voices can have distinctive tones and timbres. Allison Janney's voice connotes assuredness and practicality. So I can understand Kaiser Permanente using her, but I wonder if it truly is worth the additional expense. I am sure there is radio talent out there with similar characteristics.

Free advertising

Yesterday, I was watching the local evening news. The anchor was reporting on health issues, including how teenage girls view their bodies. The anchor said that media images, which are often manipulated, affect body image, giving women an unrealistic expectation of what is perfect. So far so good. However, the anchor started talking about a new COMMERCIAL from Dove, regarding how the media manipulates these images.

A year or two ago, Dove started an ad campaign to "celebrate" women's bodies by using "real" women as models. Apparently, they have upped the ante and now are using documentary style commercials to criticize the media. There are a couple of

issues here. First of all, this entire campaign was created to generate buzz for Dove. To obtain free publicity in the form of media reports about a different campaign, etc. So the anchor of this local newscast became a publicity agent for Dove, and used their images to talk about the serious issue of teenage body image. OK, but what is Dove trying to do? It is trying to position itself as a company that does not exploit women's issues with body image. Why? To sell product, of course! Dove does not advertise purely to help women deal with their body image issues. It is trying to make viewers think that it cares about women, that its products are "women-friendly." Clever? Yes. Different? Yes. Why do I have an issue with it? Because in the end, no for-profit company is doing any public service without expecting something in return. And when their commercials are being touted as if they were bona fide documentaries, we have a problem.

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.

What's good endures

I have been thumbing through old magazines, which is a quick way to see just how fast graphics and tastes change. If you were to pick up a magazine from 1990 you would really feel the difference. Some of it is more sophisticated tools, but some

of it is just changing taste. In any case, I came across a print ad for a Fig Newton Snack Bar that is “just 100 calories.” (When will this fascination with 100 calories end? What is so magical about 100???) I don’t think Nabisco makes these anymore, but the tag line “Snack Happy” is still in use. Why? Because it’s good. Period. What more do you want from a tag line? It is short, succinct and connotes at least two emotional states: guilt-free and contentment (or guilt-free contentment). So Nabisco has kept the tag line and got rid of the “snack fairy.” Remember the snack fairy? It was some guy dressed in a tutu that gave you snacks you could enjoy, EVEN if you were on a diet. I just did a quick search and now Nabisco is running a “Snack Purple” campaign to celebrate women (huh?). In any case, this is not even close to being as enduring and clever as Snack Happy. Snack Purple? First of all, how does purple connote women? And second, who eats a color other than orange?

A marketer should aim to create those enduring tag lines. MasterCard of course has “For everything else there is MasterCard.” Nike has “Just Do It.” These endure because they transcend whatever the image/graphic/fad of the moment is and communicate quickly and effectively to their intended audience. If you can think of other great tag lines, please let me know.

Going green is all the rage

Earth Day makes everyone go green, right? Yesterday, once again, I saw a television commercial for Chevron that touted how a gas company can do good for the environment. It’s a long commercial—probably one minute long, and it shows “green” images such as fields of wheat, etc. I wonder what the target

is. Do you buy gasoline based on green practices? Do you believe oil companies can be green? After all, the commercial did not mention specific initiatives that Chevron is invested in, it only claims they are working on “human” interest. In fact, the whole commercial is so stylized and designed for an emotional response that it made me doubt its sincerity and accuracy.

Obviously, being green is an important attribute these days. Some companies have the actions to back up the claims. Whole Foods has banned plastic bags at check out, for instance. Some companies print on recycled paper and make a note of it. Some companies try to use recyclable paper and inks for the printed materials. But I can’t recall a green campaign that has made me sit up and take notice. I know it is the hot topic du jour, but companies can use the current interest in the environment both to their advantage and to help the planet. If they can actually walk the walk, and tell people about it at the same time, they are truly ahead of the game. That is why the Chevron commercial did nothing for me. They are telling me how interested they are in the environment, but they are not actually telling me specifics.

Advertising in the Friendly Skies

It is not a new phenomenon that the airlines sell advertising. Their main selling points always involve the terms “captive audience,” since at 25,000 feet no one is going anywhere. On my USAir flight on Friday, I noticed that the airline has certainly been working this captive audience angle. All ticket jackets had an ad for Geico and its ubiquitous gecko. And one

flight segment, the tray tables were covered over with a ad on a sticker. The interesting thing is that although I did use the tray table, I cannot recall what the advertiser was. I do recall the product—it was virtual voicemail. I think that this is the challenge for advertising on board—you can't take action and you may not have pen and paper readily available to make a note to check when you get back on the ground. Or you may be wrapped up in your book or traveling companion's conversation to even notice.

On the other hand, Skymall must be somewhat successful. They have had their catalog onboard for many years. Skymall offers the most unusual selection of goods (whether you NEED any of these is another discussion). People who board a flight without any reading material or other forms of entertainment nearly always end up perusing the catalog. I wonder if any buy or if it's just a source of amusement.

In any case, the airlines are desperate for additional sources of income. As discussed a few days ago, USAir is set to start charging for "premium" seats in economy class, and all airlines will start charging fees for the second piece of checked baggage come May. It will not surprise me if soon we start seeing ads being played on the TV monitors at full volume for at least the first few minutes of the flight. It will also not surprise me if the flight attendants start pushing a product other than the airlines' own credit card/frequent flyer program.

Cynical marketing

Yesterday, I received an email announcement from US Airways. It is about something they call "choice seats." As part of the

growing trend to nickel and dime air travelers, USAir is getting into the fray by offering window and aisle seats in the front of the cabin for purchase. They are attempting to sell this as a benefit. By labeling it choice seats, and offering it for free to their Preferred Dividend Miles members, they are ensuring everyone else is stuck in middle seats. What I find so unsavory about this practice is that they are publicizing it. And making it seem like a good thing. The only people who will benefit from this practice is the USAir higher ups. Gate agents will be even more harrassed as people jockey for better seats, now not available UNLESS you pay. Honestly, this makes me sick. Playing to peoples disgust with flying these days, and seeing an opportunity to extract some more money from the public, USAir will sell you a right to a better seat. If you don't pony up some cash, you can rest assured you will be seated in the last row , in the middle, next to the bathroom. Lovely.

Social Marketing at the Presidential Level

The 2008 election is being played out across new media. From the YouTube debates to the Facebook pages every candidate seems to have. I heard recently that Chelsea Clinton is asking everyone to "friend" her on Facebook, presumably so she can then have an email list of potential supporters for her mother. Today, I saw something very interesting. John McCain (or rather one of his campaigners) posted a question on LinkedIn. LinkedIn has a great tool called Answers. Through it, people can ask for advice and experts can share their knowledge. McCain used the Answers feature to ask what issues are top priority for Americans. I think this is brilliant on

his campaign's part. First, the campaign will receive some honest answers from Americans around the United States, some who probably would not have this type of access to a campaign. McCain will also create interest and some good will, because he is asking what is important. It makes his campaign look new media savvy as well.

In short, 2008 will show us just how effective social marketing can be. Obviously, campaigns think it is important. It helps raise visibility. The test will be in November and to see how many voters turn out, and why they turned out.

Sunday mornings

I used to be quite a fan of Meet the Press and other Sunday morning talk shows. At the time, Orrin Hatch was a favored guest, and boy, he was ALWAYS on. So I stopped watching. I also really liked David Brinkley, and of course, he passed on. Now, I only watch the programs occasionally. What hasn't changed is the advertisers and type of advertising. Sunday morning public affairs shows have image advertising, rarely retail. Back in the day, a huge advertiser on Sunday was the Archer Daniel Midlands company. Or BASF (we don't make the plastic we make the plastic better). This past Sunday, I noticed image advertising for Boeing. Clearly, viewers are not shopping for their very own 737. These commercials are mostly designed to promote the company as a do-gooder or a well run company and really, are designed to appeal to the company's own stakeholders (employees, shareholders and other internal audiences). It is a very unique segment of advertising. The idea also is that policy wonks and other influential people tune in to these Sunday morning shows and these image commercials are meant to create name recognition for these

companies. Of course, at some point, policy wonks will be involved in an airline requisition and may have to choose between Boeing and McDonnell Douglas. I wonder if these image campaigns truly influence these types of choices. After all, there is a large difference between choosing Jif Peanut Butter instead of Skippy and deciding to buy a Boeing 727 over a MD-80.

More tagging

Today, I picked up new glasses at For Eyes. The name is brilliant. And the tag is great: The store for people who can't see spending a lot for glasses. I love this! Clever but not at the expense of making sense. And, I really like their ads...generally funny. Plus, I got good service and what I hope are a nice pair of glasses at a reasonable price.