

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.

Talk to your doctor

There are so many medicines being peddled on television and in print...most notably ones for erectile dysfunction, cholesterol and GERD. Yesterday, during the ABC Evening News with Charles Gibson, I saw a commercial that left me shaking my head. It was for a prescription pain medication, although it took about half the length of the commercial before that was clear. The commercial itself was the longest I have ever seen for a drug—either a minute or a minute and a half. It purported to discuss both the risks and benefits of this drug, while comparing it to similar drugs. This class of drugs, NSAIDs, have been shown to cause heart risks. The commercial was completely graphic—no actors playing tennis or gardening. And it went on and on. But what most astonished me was that for the first 30 seconds, it seemed almost like a public service announcement (PSA) talking about the various dangers of this type of drug, and specifically pointing out the dangers of the drug being advertised!!! It was weird.

If you want to know the name of the drug, please email me and then you can talk to your doctor about it!

Segmented audiences

Last night, PBS aired African American Lives Part 2, a series exploring African American history featuring Henry Louis Gates, Jr. This documentary is really wonderful—interesting and informative. I highly recommend it (it goes on Wednesdays through February). On the marketing side, it was interesting to see who was sponsoring the show: Coca-Cola, Johnson and Johnson, AMBI and others. Coke had an ad made specifically for the series, focusing on African American history and achievement. It was highly stylized and designed to appeal to emotion. Johnson and Johnson did something similar...about generations and showing how “baby changes everything.” The family appearing the J&J ad was black. I started thinking about how we process messaging in this day and age. If I am black, do I have to see a black family using a product to consider it? If I am white, and I see the aforementioned J&J commercial, do I disregard it because it is so clearly targeting African Americans?

Audiences have always been segmented, and advertisers have always worked to tailor their messages to each audience's needs. Aren't we so tremendously media exposed that we would see different ads for the same product on different channels/media outlets? Does the message really change? Certain products, like AMBI, are meant specifically for African Americans. The company probably does not advertise too much on mass media. But do other products, which may not be so specific (Coke for instance), need to present different advertising? Or maybe it is not about need per se, but rather image...

Super Political

Super Tuesday is here. There is a lot of media hoopla about this—ABC, CBS and NBC were discussing it non-stop during the morning news shows. All candidates have ramped up advertising for the primary, and Barack Obama even ran an ad during the Super Bowl.

Political advertising is tough, especially on a national level. You want to hit the right chord to get out your supporters, convert non-supporters and not alienate everyone else. Obama has to be very careful not to alienate Clinton supporters (and vice versa for Hillary Clinton with Obama supporters), because there is a potential ticket of Obama/Clinton to contend with after the presidential candidate is chosen.

Since I have only seen the Obama ad, I can only comment on that. His strategy is very clear: emphasize change to appeal to everyone disenchanted with the current administration AND to everyone who doesn't want to see Bill Clinton back in the White House. He is also working hard to appeal to the Millennials. This is wise—I think Millennials will turn out for this election, and of all the candidates currently out there, Obama probably has the most appeal.

Super Ad or Super Bad?

I admit I didn't watch Super Bowl 43 in its entirety. So, I wasn't able to watch every ad. In a sense, all the ads were predictable. Some trying to hard to be interesting (while not achieving a thing for their brand) and others just bland. Fox was pushing their programs big time, especially the falling-

in-the-ratings American Idol. Ads got lots of added value—you can see the ads again on MySpace. And, commentators will discuss the ads in the newspapers and on TV. In the end, this is the real strategy: get publicity for your ad.

The most ubiquitous advertising came from a certain “king” of beers. It makes me wonder what their advertising strategy is. Is it to establish supremacy as the number one beer advertiser? Is it to make sure that the audience does not know there are other types of beers out there? Is it to make sure you get good and drunk while watching the Super Bowl? As a beer drinker, there is no amount of beer advertising that would make me want to drink that stuff. It is all about the taste, right?

Some ads just made me shake my head. Garmin had a Napoleon re-enactor (I think) driving to a re-enactment. Huh? Sunsilk compared Marilyn Monroe, Shakira and Madonna? The Victoria's Secret Valentine's Ad I felt, was offensive to women by objectifying. I didn't get the Doritos ad at all. I must be in the wrong demo. Some ads were genuinely funny—the Planter's ad, Nationwide and Taco Bell (the Fiesta Platter). E-trade seems to want you to think they are so simple to use a baby could do it.

The cola wars are always played out during the Super Bowl. Pepsi's Justin Timberlake ad was funny and big budget. Coke took a more subdued approach...not as frenetic or loud. Clearly, Pepsi is trying hard to appeal to a younger demographic. In fact Coke's political ad, featuring James Carville, would be surely lost on a younger person. I liked them both.

My favorite ads were for Careerbuilder.com. They were created based on certain truisms about career planning—you should follow your heart and wishing won't make it so. Clever. Of course, Monster had one that showed people trying to block the sun, and thus Monday, because of the dread of going back to work. Also clever. Both trying to appeal to people's

unhappiness (is it so widespread?) with work.

In the end, I wonder if spending this much money on production and media space pays off. Will you drink more Bud? Are you going to try SoBe water? Are you going to apply for a new job?

Necessary information

Today, in the Washington Post, I saw an ad for a ski resort. It is \$79 per night and seems reasonable (not that I ski, but if I did...). However, I don't know where this resort is located. Why? Because the ad either deliberately or by mistake omitted this crucial information. Maybe they want me to visit the website for more information (the URL address is included). Maybe they just think people know where they are located. In either case this is a no-no. Ads are meant to stimulate interest and action. There is the whole AIDA theory (attention, interest, desire, action). Although this ad caught my attention, I lost my interest when I got frustrated at not knowing where this place is located. Perhaps knowing this resort is located close by would pique my interest. Maybe not. But ads should never make their readers work too hard. In this case, I need to get to my computer with the ad in hand to find out a very crucial bit of information.

Headline here

How important are headlines? In news, they are super important, especially to people like me who scan rather than

read the newspaper. A headline tells you the bare essence of the story, and it either catches your attention or it doesn't. It is much the same in public relations except PR folk get a chance to have a really long headline and perhaps even add a subheadline or two. You sometimes get extra points for clever.

In advertising...well...I am not sure. Design, graphics, placement and offer make up 99% of an ad. Strong creative headlines can cause interest. But simple headlines, like "We are having a sale" can communicate easily and effectively without trying too hard to be clever. That said, I love headlines that are a play on words or use words elegantly.

One of my favorite types of ads are the ones where the headline tells you one thing, and the graphics tell a different story. Currently here in Washington there is an ad you can see on the Metro for Washington Sports Club. The headline says: "This January, help is on the way." The graphic shows an overweight man, sitting on a couch, watching tv and drinking a soda, while walking his dog on a treadmill. Funny as hell. And makes you look at it and just shake your head. Love it!

Any favorite headlines or ads?

PS—Here's a look at the graphic from the ad I quote above:
<http://www.mysportsclubs.com/regions/WSC.htm>