

Writing for your audience

According to Netflix, the British/BBC series Gavin and Stacey garners four and a half stars. This is why I added it to my queue. But I watched the first season (all on one DVD) and I rated the thing two stars. (Quick plot explanation: Gavin, who lives in Essex, and Stacey, who lives in Wales, meet over the phone and decide to meet in person after six months. They fall in love. Meanwhile, they each have a best friend: Smithy for Gavin and Nessa for Stacey, who also get involved.)

I have no doubt that many people find Gavin and Stacey hilarious. In fact, some of the acting is very good, and some of the situations are painfully relevant. However, it is clear that the intended audience is British. For instance, the whole Wales is another country joke. In the United States, we would be hard pressed to find Wales on the map of the UK, and for the British, Wales is quite literally another country (just like Scotland). There is rivalry between them, and there is some kind of joke on how the Londoners can't understand what the Welsh are saying. OK, I get it, but I don't really get it in the way a British person would.

And then, there is the culture of a place. Apparently, smoking is still a normal thing to do in Britain. There is smoking indoors and out, by everyone. In the U.S., we have steered away from showing this much smoking, and I don't think I have seen much on TV. In Britain, the culture is OK with smoking. To me, it is jarring (and adds nothing to the plot).

In short, I didn't find Gavin and Stacey quite as amusing as if I had been British. That is because the series is written by the British for the British. Yes, some things are universal (weird in-laws, weird friends, not wanting to reveal secrets), which is why we can watch programs from different countries and get it. Humor though, is harder to convey.

The bottom line is that you write for your audience. To do this, you must understand who your audience is and what makes them tick. We define audiences in all sorts of ways: demographically, geographically and so on. Case in point: you would not write an ad directed to a 65 plus demographic using teen slang. It just wouldn't make sense.

Understand your audience and tailor your word choice and message to their needs and sensibilities.

Copyright 2009 Deborah Brody



Print or online?

If you are a media buyer, and you are given the choice of only the online edition or the print edition of your local daily newspaper, which do you choose? Kind of a tricky question, right?

Last week, I attended a panel on business news and media, specifically tailored for public relations people. One of the panelists was the tech writer at the Washington Post. He told us how his column on personal tech runs in the paper on Sunday but is posted online on Friday. When I heard this I thought that the Post is cannibalizing itself. After all, if you can get the exact same content plus links and commentaries, online, why ever would you subscribe to the Post? (Note to self: think about whether I should cancel Post subscription).

But, apparently, the two editions (print and online) have different audiences. Most people who exclusively read online NEVER read the print edition, and those who read the print edition will only go to the online version when they want more

information. This is what came out of a survey of the attendees to this panel (put on by the Washington Network Group Communications Roundtable).

What online offers that print does not is a multimedia experience, plus more (more info, links, comments, blogs). Online is also more current, updated frequently and that is what people expect.

Another panelist, the editor for the Washington Business Journal, said that they do have different content online than on the print edition, and it is more updated. However, they just started a blog, get this, TWO WEEKS ago. But WBJ may have an older base, who still wants the print edition and may not even visit the online edition.

Bottom line to answer the question is this: is the online version better than the print version? And, what is your core target audience? If the online version is better, and has a better readership, certainly buy online only. If the online version is a skeleton version of the print, buy the print. And ultimately, look at the audience numbers. You want to buy where most of your audience is.

Your thoughts and experiences welcome!



How to: Develop a tagline

Does your business have a tagline? If yes, does it accurately convey what you do? If not, why not?

Every business should have a tagline, no doubt. **A tagline is an additional bit of information that clarifies what you do to**

your potential customers. Now, a tagline is not a motto. Webster's defines a motto as "a short expression of a guiding principle." A motto could be something generic, like "we always do our best," which can be seen as something your employees rally around but that does not communicate anything about what your business does.

What is a slogan? Webster's gives three definitions: 1) a war cry; 2) phrase used to express a characteristic position or goal; 3) attention-getting phrase used in promotion. Clearly definition number 1 is not what we are after. And the difference between two and three is really the difference between a slogan and a tagline. A slogan should be unchanging, something that is more universal (your goals or your purpose) and your tagline can change for a particular ad campaign. And yes, a slogan and a tagline can be one and the same.

For instance, if you are a hospital or clinic, your slogan might be your commitment to a healthy future for all. If you are running an ad campaign, you might focus on a certain aspect of your practice like cardiology and your tagline might focus on helping patients achieve heart health. All the while your motto could be something about maintaining the highest standard in hygienic practices.

So, how do you develop a tagline? First make sure you are not developing a motto. Be more specific about what you are trying to communicate about your product or service.

Steps:

1) **Understand your product or service and its USP.** This seems fairly obvious but you would be surprised at how very few people can communicate succinctly what they do. You might start with a short description of your product and service. Think about attributes, descriptors and differentiators

2) **Brainstorm.** Write out 10-20 short lines (5-10 words) about your product or service. Incorporate some descriptors and

attributes from above.

3) **Evaluate.** Which is catchy? Which is comprehensive? Which is too generic? Eliminate anything that is cliché, generic, or just doesn't say enough.

4) **Narrow down your list** to 3-5 choices and show them to your principal stakeholders.

5) Have a **vote**. Generally, one tagline will emerge as the best one.

One more thing. People often confuse logo and slogan. A logo is a GRAPHIC representation of your slogan/motto. A logo is never a written piece. And logos are best left to design professionals. I would strongly counsel you to not try doing this at home!



Everything can be bought

A few months ago, I wrote about airline advertising. You have probably all seen the ads on traytables and on the backs of tickets. This is fine as long as it keeps the beverages free and keeps the airlines flying. But today I am writing about airport advertising. Airports have always had plenty of places to advertise, from the bag carousels to the luggage carts. But now, I have seen the most unusual type of airport advertising yet: advertising on the outside of the gate connector.

Yesterday I was at Miami International Airport, not my favorite airport but that would be the subject for a whole other blog, and as our airplane pulled up to the gate, I noticed that all the gate connectors were sporting HSBC Bank

advertising.

I have never seen this type of advertising before, and I wonder two things, how much it costs and how much impact it can have. Sure, lots of passengers are potentially trapped audiences for this type of advertising, but why would a bank choose this type of advertising? More sense would be for a fast food restaurant (one with a branch inside the airport) or a soft drink or something that you would buy soon, but a bank? Are you going to go open an account because you see that it is advertised quite literally on the airport structure itself?

In any case, this shows that advertising can be placed almost everywhere. Creativity or business greed?

When the tag line doesn't add up

There is a commercial that annoys me because its tag line is just plain stupid. OK, there are probably several commercials like that, but I just saw the one for Smucker's this morning. You know Smucker's –it makes jam and jelly. It is widely available. It may even be good (if you happen to like a little High Fructose Corn Syrup in your jam). But Smucker's assumes that you and everyone else on the planet thinks Smucker's is good. They can be forgiven for that, after all, they are in the business of promoting their product. What I can't fathom is why they think their name conveys the goodness of their product. Smucker's? It looks remarkably like a word in Yiddish that is not exactly complimentary. And yet, the company's marketers tell us: With a name like Smucker's, it has to be good. I am left thinking, really? Why? What is it about the

NAME Smucker that makes it good? Is Smucker will known for all the good things he did? Am I missing something? If the tag simply said: With Smucker's, it has to be good, then I would buy it. But the name is meaningless to me and other than we know that Smucker's makes jams, we don't know from the name alone that they are good.

Do you have a tag line that makes you wonder or even cringe? Let me know in the comments!



Are we losing radio too?

Advertising dollars

It doesn't make it into the news too often, but radio is hurting from the same causes as the newspaper industry is: advertising losses. In radio's case, it has a lot do with Ipod and MP3 players. But it has a lot to do with the recession too.

Format change! That's the solution!

I was just reading this *Washington Post* article about a classic rock station here in Washington that is (AGAIN) changing formats to adult/pop contemporary. The station's owners seem to think this will attract a younger, female audience. It might, if it weren't for the fact that nearly every other radio station in the market plays Pop and AC. It seems inane/insane to switch formats in this economy. The article says that they station had good numbers, yet it was not enough.

You can't (and shouldn't) please everybody

It seems to me this has something to do with what brought Wall Street down: GREED. The idea that you have to have the most, and by a large margin, to be the absolute leader. It does not serve the listener, and it certainly will not accomplish it in the end. People become fiercely loyal to a radio station and its DJs. Whenever there is a format change there will be upheaval and resentment. And frankly, in this market, this particular change causes a homogenization that is truly unbearable.

What about segmentation and target audiences?

When all radio stations play the same music, you can assume they all have the same audience, right? So, if you are trying to reach older people, where are you supposed to advertise in Washington? My point is that a variety of formats allows media buyers to reach different target audiences. Not everybody is seeking for women, 18 plus. Some may want adults, 40 plus or another segment. In a sense, format changes affect the entire market.

Losing sight of what you are

It seems to me that when you aim for the mass, you actually end up losing what makes you special. This particular radio station has gone through several format changes and I predict will either change again or go off the air. In the era of the Ipod/MP3 player and declining revenue, the solution is to offer something that can NOT be found elsewhere. That is how you find an audience, and more importantly, how you build a LOYAL following.



The opinion ad

Newspapers are in a downward spiral

Every day there is more bad news for the newspaper industry. The *New York Times* will eliminate its City section, Chicago Sun-Times is filing Chapter 11, *Washington Post* is offering its fourth buyout in 6 years, and on and on. Even CBS Sunday Morning covered the coming “death” of newspapers.

Paid opinions

One area that is fairly unique to newspapers is the paid opinion ad. Usually a full page, this ad will carry the unadulterated opinion of an organization, group, industry or even individual. The target is public opinion and/or lawmakers. We’ve seen “it’s our fault” ads and “you’re wrong and here’s why” ads. In fact, this is a time honored way of getting opinions across without the filter of an editor or a reporter.

Where will they go?

Sure there is advertising on the Internet, between pop ups and banners, we’re often inundated with advertising messages. However, we can pretty much ignore these ads. Only if we are in the market for say, acai diet supplement, do we click to find out more. Opinion ads use the full page newspaper format because they need the space to communicate a complicated message. It’s not about a sale or product attributes. I can’t see how these type of ads will subsist in an Internet-only market.



On doing things piecemeal

Are you a small business with a tight marketing budget?

If you are, you probably have fallen prey to the idea that you should do (marketing) things as you can afford them. You know, an ad here, a brochure there. Budget-wise, this may make sense. After all, you can't afford a large campaign, or an ad agency. Branding-wise, not so much. It's tough to build up an image on unconnected pieces of the puzzle. The missing link is the connection, or the reason, behind each piece.

Think strategically

In business, there is strategy and there are tactics. Often companies fall into tactics without thinking about the strategy. Many people can't tell the difference. Here's a quick example: sending a press release is a tactic, achieving positive publicity is a strategy. Ideally, tactics should follow your strategy.

You must know what you want to accomplish so that you can figure the steps to make it happen.

Often, small business owners are overwhelmed with trying to do everything: managing staff, invoicing, doing the books, buying inventory, negotiating. Marketing may be a distant thought, something to do when there is down time. This is unfortunate because marketing will bring business in. Neglecting your marketing will result in a business downturn, for sure.

Develop a basic marketing plan

The easiest thing to do is to devote some time to thinking about what you want to accomplish. Perhaps you want more female customers, or larger organizations. Write these goals down. Figure out who your current customers are. Figure out how much budget you can afford to devote to marketing. See

what you already have and what you need.

Here are some elements of a marketing plan:

- Current situation/Situation analysis
- Goals
- Target audience
- Budget
- Tactics for reaching target audience (and this is where your ads, brochures, press releases fit in)

Remember, doing marketing piecemeal will only result in getting small chunks of your target audience.



Time to sharpen your online skills

The bad news for print continues to pour in. New research from Pew indicates that many Americans do not consider having a local newspaper important. It is as if management knows this. McClatchy, the owner of the *Miami Herald* and other newspapers, just announced personnel cuts this week. The bottom line is that newspapers are hurting and many people don't care. Why? Because many people get their news online or from TV.

Recently, I read how a PR guy was lamenting the downfall of trade publications. I read this on his BLOG. He, like many PR folk, schooled in the "old" days, learned that to do media relations you reached out to print journalists. A nice, print piece in a trade magazine was truly a prize for the client. I also learned to do PR this way. And nothing was more exciting than seeing your client's name in the newspaper, especially on

the front page. But the reality has shifted. More and more, the news is being reported on and broken online. Many people do not read the newspaper, and during the day, certainly do not watch TV. What these people do however, is access the Internet. Many offices allow unlimited Internet access, and certain folk, do their work ON the Internet. In any case, it is time for PR people, and advertising people, and in fact, all communications people, to accept this reality.

Instead of lamenting that blogs now are main sources of information, and that no one is reading trade publications, you must ADAPT to the new realities. Of course, newspapers are not quite dead yet, but teach yourself how to use the online world. Here are a few suggestions:

1) Are there **influential blogs** in your area of expertise? Find out and follow. Not every blog is created equal. The PR guy I mentioned before made the blanket statement that blogs are unreliable. How wrong he is. Very few people would call The Huffington Post or Politico or the Daily Beast unreliable. Yes, they contain opinion, but it is LEADING opinion.

2) **Learn where your potential clients/customers/target audience goes to get their news AND entertainment.** After all, the Web is not just about information. Lots of people play games on the Internet, listen to music and find out about their hobbies.

3) Enhance your **web writing skills**. Writing for the web is not the same as writing for print. You have to be more concise. You have to be more choppy. People read differently online than in print.

4) **Explore multimedia.** People are more visual on the web. And the web allows for video/audio in addition to text.

In sum, stay ahead of the game. Nothing is to be gained from wringing our hands and lamenting the end of print. Instead, find new opportunities. I am sure in the late 1940s, PR people

everywhere were concerned about the box in everyone's livingroom. By now, most PR agencies are experts at B-roll and media training. Right?



Overuse syndrome

You've probably seen or heard some words or phrases in ads/commercials so much that they have become meaningless. They do nothing to bring you in or tell you anything about the product or service. Yet, you will continue seeing and hearing them. Why? Because copywriters and in certain cases the advertising manager is enamored of the word or words and can't think of others.

At the top of my list of most overused words in advertising (and thus most meaningless) is the word **unique**. You've heard things like "a unique product," "unique way," etc. BTW, this is also overused in PR. Very few things in this world are unique, and then ad folk decide that some things are not only unique, but truly unique. Truly? (as opposed to fakely?). Other words/phrases that are overused as to become meaningless are: special, best, time of your life, out of the box, outside the lines, and so on.

If you find yourself about to use an overused phrase, think to yourself, is this a cliché? What other thing can be highlighted about my product? What is its USP—and that can't be that it is unique, but what **MAKES** it unique. No, it is not easy, and that is why we see these words and phrases used over and over. But if you want your materials to communicate the essence of what you are trying to sell, then you will benefit from being unique in avoiding this word.

What are your most overused words?

