

Capital District Business Review

Serving New York's Capital Region

Creative advertising cuts through radio clutter

A couple of months ago, I attended what I consider to be one of the best seminars on creativity I've ever attended, and I've been to more than a few.

Sponsored by the Ad Club and the Capital District Radio Group—a loose confederacy of most of the area's radio stations—the breakfast seminar was advertised as a seminar about creativity in radio advertising.

It was, but so many of the principals advocated by speaker Jeffrey Hedquist are



appropriate for other media and ad agency folks that I thought those comments would be valuable you, as well.

First, a few words about Hedquist. Based in Fairfield, Iowa (really!), he's a national radio/TV voice talent who you can hear speaking for Konica, Oldsmobile, Hardee's, Time-Life, HBO/Cinemax, Dutch Boy Paints. He's also an audio creator/producer who has won more than 400 international, national and local awards. His Hedquist Productions works for clients, agencies and producers in 36 states. And, as his pre-typed intro says, "Jeffrey is a speaker for advertising, marketing and broadcast groups, weddings, bar mitzvahs and christenings."

He's also very, very good at what he does—in this case, talking about being creative in advertising. Here are some of his thoughts:

- Humor and imagination are our greatest wasted resource.
- Radio forces you—the advertiser—to get the audience to participate, and forces people in the audience to use their imaginations. Radio is the "theater of the gut"; it

gets you the emotional response. In radio, you can use sound effects, music, voice and silence to achieve the desired effect. So use sound effects to tell the audience where to go; write your commercials so that you talk one-on-one—don't write for print.

- Using a single voice gives you great opportunities; there are many voice types and kinds. The right voice can help you break through the "clutter" of other advertising.

- Most dialogue commercials don't sound like "real life." You can improve your dialogue commercials by taping a real conversation, then noting the interruptive noises. Radio dialogue should not be written as a linear production. There's really no punctuation in a dialogue and very few complete sentences.

Remember, the audience doesn't have to hear the "who" message the first time, so you can layer your ideas. In dialogue commercials, use a skeptic, someone who's not always agreeing with the main speaker. Build in conflict to attract the audience with argument, disagreement and correction.

- Get your producer involved from the initial step of the creative process; he/she will provide ideas and creative help, and then will feel some ownership of the product.

- Empathize with your audience; put yourself in its place. Use focus groups (youth, seniors, ethnics) to help highlight what you need to do.

- When writing for radio, ask "Where is the camera"? Remember you're creating visuals for the audience and you're seeking better audience involvement. So, tantalize the right and left brains. Talk your commercial, don't write it!

- When your write a 30-second spot, think of it as a 10-second spot. That forces you to get the idea's kernel. Find one strong concept, then expand it. Write your scripts in upper and lower case. It's easier to read and will save you time—and money—in the studio.

- Remember that radio commercials are part of programming. Thus, you really face

a five-second test with every spot—the four to five seconds you have to get and keep the audience's attention with your commercial. Read it out loud, then ask (and get an *honest* answer from) yourself, "Would I continue to listen to this?"

You can improve your dialogue commercials by taping a real conversation. Radio dialogue should not be written as a linear production. There's really no punctuation in a dialogue and very few complete sentences.

Make your spot fit with your listener's lifestyle. Get a headline. Make the audience co-create. Radio is the ideal commercial entertainer and marketer—you can't separate them. So give the audience a reason to stay.

- Stuck with writer's block? Bust it by using the music or a sound effect as a starting point. Then, talk your commercial.

- Radio can help you suspend belief. For instance, you can compress time and create an event that took much longer in just a few seconds. You can create a character to make your pitch believable.

- Sound's ability to evoke emotion is important. Your best sales pitch must "reach out and touch" someone.

Hedquist's remarks obviously were geared to radio salespeople. But the creative types in the agencies and the account execs who have to sell ways to do things to the customer sure could have benefitted from this seminar.

Thanks to both the Capital District Radio Group and the Ad Club for bringing Hedquist to the area. You performed a great service!