

RADIO AND PRODUCTION

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The Magazine For Radio's Production Personnel

Who Says a Town of 10,000
Can't Support a
Major International
Production
House?



Interview:
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Jeffrey Hedquist Hedquist Productions, Inc. Fairfield, Iowa

RAP: Where did it all begin for you?

Jeffrey: In elementary school. I was the bane of many teachers' existences in a lot of ways, making mouth noises, making wise comments, doing what I could to win an audience over in the classroom. The term "Class Clown" usually means some loveable, jolly character. I think I was looked upon more as "disciplinary problem."

In high school I channeled that into more useful endeavors and actually ended up with a performing career, onstage in school plays, singing and playing in folk music groups for school assemblies, talent shows and that sort of thing.

It was one of those instances when we were performing on a radio show, and when we finished up, the Program Director said, "Jeez, you have kind of a good voice. Did you ever think of going into radio?" Until that moment, no, but it sounded like a good idea. So I was then given my first job in radio. I was sixteen years old, and I had a rock and roll show on a little five hundred watt day-time station in Bristol, Connecticut. It was on Saturdays, sandwiched right between the Polish hour and the Italian hour.

My next experience with radio was at Union College in Schenectady, New York. When I arrived, this radio station was off the air. Soon in my college career I was to meet a guy named Dick Ferguson, who some years later founded New City Communications which ended up owning twenty or so radio stations around the country, the American Comedy Network, New City Marketing Group, and Park City Communications, among others. New City was recently sold to Cox Communications. So here was another radio maniac who started his career as a teenager, and there we were, thrown together at Union College in Schenectady. It was WRUC, a carrier current station, and we programmed it into a top forty station and got local, regional, and even some national advertisers. We ran

it eighteen hours a day. It was the biggest activity on campus. The signal leaked all over Schenectady, but I don't know if it ever showed up in an Arbitron. Union was all male at the time. A couple of years later we started a parallel station at Union's sister school, Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs. So it was a combination of a great interest in radio and testosterone overload that started a radio station on the all female

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campus at Skidmore. We then built those two stations into something called Empire State Regional Representatives, and we started repping other college stations. That was later absorbed into the Ivy League Radio Network.

We played some interesting games and got a lot of attention from advertising agencies and broadcast people while we were still in college. During that time in college, I had the opportunity on every available vacation to work in as many occupations as I could at 9 different radio stations, from news to disk jockey to reading the farm report. You name it; I did it. I even got to produce some commercials. At one point while I was in college, I was doing mornings at fifty thousand watt WPTR in Albany, which was screaming rock and roll, and in the afternoons I did a classical show on WFLY in Troy. I went from The Supremes in the morning to Gustav Mahler in the afternoon, an interesting juxtaposition. So that's kind of how I got into the radio business.

RAP: What happened after your college days.

Jeffrey: I actually got a radio job after college for about a year, and that was the only time I've ever worked full time for anybody else. It was WNHC in New Haven, Ferguson and I both worked there. I learned how to sell radio time, and I also learned how to work with Production Directors. I got a chance to see how all aspects of a radio station need to work together, which was very valuable in terms of what I'm doing now. Then Ferguson went off to WERE in Cleveland, and I very soon founded my own company, Sound Concepts, Inc. in Connecticut. That was in 1968. We started as a radio production company, added original music production, then animation, film, video, and multi-image presentations.

I probably produced and directed television for about fifteen years, but of all the things I ever did, I really enjoyed sound and music more than anything. It was too many days in TV studios spending six hours to light a table-top setting that would end up as three and a half seconds in a TV commercial, spending hours and hours outside waiting for the planes to go by, having three people move the scrims as the sun went across the sky, running up the street to pay twenty dollars to each of seven construction workers so they could stop making noise just for a few seconds so we could get this one shot. I directed and produced all that stuff for about fifteen years, as well as radio, but my real love was always sound. So at some point I made a decision and ended up moving to the Great Midwest at the end of 1984 and just decided to do what I really loved.

When we were in Connecticut, I thought we were pretty hot stuff. We had clients in six states, maybe, and I wondered, "What am I really going to be able to do in Fairfield, Iowa?" Now we have clients in forty-four states and four coun-

tries, just proving once again that it doesn't really matter where you are. It's been very rewarding, and now we are producing things for advertising agencies, primarily, but also for advertisers, other producers, and some radio stations around the country. It was just me when I started, and it has now grown into a team of people here like our engineer Andy MacKenzie who cut his teeth in the production room at WBCN in Boston and has been responsible for hundreds of our biggest successes, Jim Garrett our Director of Client Services and sharp-eared Casting Director, and JoBeth Lewer, our den mother and Office Manager who keeps this place organized. Plus, there's a network of hundreds and hundreds of people all around the country, all around the world, actually. There are writers and producers, voice talents, composers, singers, musicians, jugglers... and we have relationships with about sixty different recording studios.

RAP: You're actually doing a lot more than just producing commercials. You have a presentation you do for various advertising groups called "Audio and Imagination." Tell us about this.

Jeffrey: It's one of the things I do for a number of reasons. I still like to perform, and that gives me an audience. Some people say their greatest fear is being asked to speak in front of an audience. My greatest joy is being pulled out of an audience seat by someone who says, "Look, take this microphone. There are five thousand people out there. Could you just entertain them for a while?" So I get a chance to do that, but it's in the context of actually giving something back, both to the industry and to promote radio.

Audio and Imagination is kind of the umbrella for all of the presentations I've given. There are probably six different kinds of presentations on audio that I give, everything from a half hour presentation to an ad club at lunch, to a full day, or maybe even a two-day seminar on creation and production for audio. It's mostly radio, but I talk a good deal about music production, sound design, and post-production for video as well.

I probably do an average of one and a half a month spread over the year, and I've given over a hundred presentations all over the country. I still promote them because I enjoy doing them, and it generates business for us. It also allows me to tell people about radio and how much fun it is because, as you know, there's a whole audience of

people out there in advertising who haven't given radio a second thought. They live for, lust for, writing for television. That's where the money is. That's where the glory is. That's where it all seems to be, but as I tell audiences, radio is really the last great writer's playground. If you can imagine it, you can create it on the radio, and by the time the presentation is finished, hopefully we've inspired some people to, if nothing else, give another thought to the possibilities of radio, maybe even excite somebody enough to make a career out of creating for radio.

I try to pass on tips, techniques, secrets that I've learned, as much of what we do here as I can, whether it's in thirty minutes, forty minutes, a half day, a full day, whatever. And the presentations have been to advertising agencies, to companies in their advertising departments, to a lot of advertising federations, advertising clubs, and to broadcast groups. I've spoken at a number

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of "Radio Days" which usually are a cooperative effort between the ad club in the area and the radio broadcasters association. I've given lectures to everything from a fourth and fifth grade class, which has to be the most challenging presentation I've ever given in my life, to Masters in writing classes around the country.

Out of this are coming some of the publications we're working on, "Radio Writer's-Block Busters," "Whole Brain Radio," and, hopefully, a number of other things that we're trying to find the time to complete. We want to be a resource for advertisers, for advertising agencies, for radio commercial writers and producers, for people who want to create good audio cassette programs. There will be a lot of audio tips, techniques, ideas, and "block-busters" in the materials we produce that, hopefully, people will be inspired and empowered by. And, heaven knows, all the ideas aren't mine. I've gathered them, adapted some that I've heard about, and combined some. Some I've actually thought of myself. We're trying to find ways to get those ideas out so that radio

commercials and radio programs and audio for other media can be better, can be more imaginative, can really take advantage of what audio does, and that is to allow a person to co-create with the medium. All good advertising does that. Radio has the ability to do it in a stronger, more involving way than any other medium by touching the sense of hearing. We can get people to feel, to laugh, to cry, to smell, to taste, to touch, and, most importantly, to see, to imagine.

RAP: You mentioned doing presentations for some radio groups. Who were the people in the audience?

Jeffrey: Well, you get a lot of Account Executives. Occasionally, the Production Director will even be there. The disappointing thing is when I go to an ad club presentation or one of these broadcast presentations, the General Manager might be there, maybe the Sales Manager, certainly two or three of the salespeople, and they'll all come up to me and say, "Boy, I wish our Production Director had heard this." And I say, "Where was he or she?" "So busy, over their heads, couldn't get out. Why are you crying, Mr. Hedquist?" It's a heartbreaker, it really is.

And I've seen it in market after market after market. I mean, this is in Amarillo as well as Cleveland. This is in New York as well as Huntington, West Virginia. So I figure the only way I can do this is to get the information on Web pages, create this "Radio Club," try to get this stuff in a useable form so that people can at least get cassettes and workbooks and follow along.

RAP: Well, hopefully, production people will pass this interview on to their GM or GSM and maybe get on the invite list for the next workshop.

Jeffrey: Maybe. They can at least petition, and it will come up. It'll be in the ad club newsletter. The production people will never see the ad club newsletter, but some of the account people will. And, hopefully, they'll be inspired, because what will happen is that if they can get their Production Director there, they will make more money. It's very simple. The production guys, hopefully, will walk away with some new skills and some new excitement.

I'd love to have Production Directors there. I'd love to have the Creative Directors of advertising agencies and Art Directors there. Some of the best radio has been produced by Art Director/copywriter teams, and I remind the Art Directors and the other people about this because who can visualize better than Art Directors?

And if the members of the audience, especially the radio people, could bring their clients to the presentation, it would be a money maker for them because, if I know in advance that an Account Executive from WXYZ has a client who insists on doing his or her own commercials and they really shouldn't, that's something I can address with ways to handle it. If they've got somebody who wants to put a laundry list of information in a radio commercial, that advertiser may or may not listen to the Account Executive. But coming from Mr. Big Shot from out of town, they may very well hear it and hear it for the first time. Maybe there's an advertiser there who insists on listing features and not benefits, putting in phone numbers when nobody is really going to listen to it, describing their location in an arcane way, some basic, simple things. Maybe he's somebody who's afraid to step out on a limb, someone who's afraid to simplify their commercial and increase its power. It's sometimes tough to hear these things from the person who is selling you the radio time, but it can be heard often from me, especially if I put it in a warm, loving, yet firm way.

RAP: I can almost draw from memory times when salespeople returned from a presentation such as yours. They come into the production room all excited saying, "I just went to this seminar and we need more theater of the mind production. Use more sound effects! Let's try humor!" It sounds like your presentations would be ideal for radio producers and copywriters.

Jeffrey: It's an opportunity for somebody to hear something. Even just over a quick lunch they'll get some ideas. And I'll have made a contact. I can be another resource for them. It seems that there is so much potential out there. There are thousands of dollars that broadcast groups, owners, and stations spent on training their salespeople, and yet, one of the most powerful resources that the sales group has is that creative person who spends eighteen hours a day down the hall in that dark, musty room. That person needs the same amount of training and help and inspiration, not for any kind of benevolent reason, but because it's going to make the station more money, and they forget that fact.

RAP: Why do you think management forgets this?

Jeffrey: I think it's a number of things. If it ain't broke, it doesn't need to be fixed. What's going to happen, though, is the

"Here we are in a rural town in Iowa, yet we've developed a talent database of over five thousand voices."

same thing that's been happening through the years. Radio advertising has a higher attrition rate--and I'd be willing to be proven wrong on this--than almost any other medium. Those account people who spend their time finding new advertiser after new advertiser after new advertiser could find the same revenue or even greater revenue by getting advertisers who actually come back because they're so happy with the results they've received. I know, it's a new concept. (laughs) It's a concept that can work. There are a lot of unhappy radio advertisers who got put on the air with copy that had to be written in four or five minutes or copy that had to be written without proper attention or resources or money behind it, or training. There are large stations throughout this country where the account person is dashing off some copy. In all honesty, the last thing an account person wants to do is write copy. They want to make sales.

RAP: How would you attack that problem? You've dealt with a lot of radio salespeople, and you know the creative problem. How would you approach this predicament of the salespeople telling the client that they can get their spot on tomorrow and then going to the creative department and saying, "Hey, this starts in the morning, and...make it real creative."

Jeffrey: I think part of it needs to be addressed in sales training programs, and it may already get addressed here. I don't know, because I'm not that familiar with current sales training programs. They should address things on production, like how to use your production facility to make more money. I know that Dennis Daniel has certainly addressed this at the NAB. I've addressed it at the RAB several times, when we've spoken at the national conferences, and it doesn't always fall on deaf ears. There are definitely people who are listening, but, again, it's time. Nobody has seen the real value of it, and I think that needs to be sold in a very bottom line kind of way.

There also need to be ways for radio

stations to broaden their resources. By that, I mean talent. Here we are in a rural town in Iowa, yet we've developed a talent database of over five thousand voices. And these are not just voices from New York and LA and Chicago. They are voices from Hartford and Denver and Houston, and Boston... they're from all over. Some of them are talents listed with some of the biggest talent agents in the country. Some are just independent folks who have their own recording studio in the basement somewhere, and there's everyone in between. And we continue to add to that talent database. Now if we can do that on that scale from Fairfield, Iowa, it would seem that a radio station in Dallas would be able to work some sort of a voice trade deal with a couple of other radio stations in Orlando or Seattle, maybe.

RAP: In your presentations you teach people how to "test" their copy. What is this about?

Jeffrey: Testing copy can be anything from formal focus groups, which we've been through--very interesting and painful--to very simple and informal focus groups. How informal? I mean sitting down at Thanksgiving in a corner on a sofa with your grandmother and grandfather and just talking to them, finding out what they like, finding out what they don't like. Do they ever listen to radio? If they do, what do they listen to? What kind of music? Do you ever listen to talk stations? What don't you like about the radio? Do you ever listen to commercials? What kind of commercials do you like? Do you remember any commercials? How about this as an idea, (carefully pulling out the copy.) You read them a commercial and see how they react to it. How would you make it different? Get a relaxed and open conversation with whomever it happens to be--your little cousins, your strange Uncle Ned, your grandmother and grandfather, your parents--and in the context of finding out what they like about life, what they don't like, what they enjoy, what touches their heart, how do they spend their money, what kind of advertising do they react to, what kind of commercials do they like, you, in a day, can learn a tremendous amount of information. It's unbelievable, and it is absolutely great fun because it structures a way for you to sit down and find out what's meaningful in the lives of somebody you haven't talked to like this before. And there's almost nothing more fun for somebody who hasn't been talked to that way, who hasn't been asked

those questions, than to do that. So, it's a big reward for them. Just ask them some questions because you want to know. You will learn a lot, and your commercials will get better. And you'll be able to write for lots of different psychographic and demographic groups because one of the abilities of a great radio creator is to be able to put yourself in that other person's shoes, to drop yourself into that other person's life, into that other person's front seat of their car listening to the radio, and find out what's going to attract their ear to hold them for a few seconds.

RAP: And it's probably important to ask the questions to someone outside the station, away from the business, right?

Jeffrey: Oh, yes. People on buses. Strike up conversations wherever you are. Or bring some people in. Now this is a rare treat for somebody at a radio station who has to create ten commercials by noon, to encourage them to take some time out, relax, and do some focus groups. "What's wrong? What is Hedquist smoking?"

You have to take those chances when you can, and you may get an opportunity once a year to do something like that. If you're creating a commercial for kids, get a bunch of kids together. Buy them some pizza and sit down and ask them some questions, and make it fun. Find ways to do that. Set up a tape recorder and record the comments, and you will get them, hopefully, to write the commercial. You might say, "Hey, I've got a pretty hip concept. What do you guys think of this?" You read it or play it and then simply ignore the fact that you have an ego because you may hear things like, "That's good," or "Man, that's really dorky. Who wrote that?" And ask them what they would do, how they would create it, and you'll get ideas.

Develop these skills. It's like anything else. If you play golf, you continue to practice, or you may get some golf videos. People who are writing commercials and producing commercials obviously aren't doing it to become rich; they're doing it because they really love it. And if you really love it, there are fun ways to improve your craft. This little interview focus group kind of technique is one way to do that, whether you've got a commercial in mind or whether you just want to find out something you can salt away for future reference. That's how we test copy, in a very informal kind of way.

Here's one of the most powerful tips on testing copy. It's the "Five Second Test."

Read or play four or five seconds of the beginning of a commercial to whatever group you're trying to reach, then stop the tape and say, "Well, what do you think? Would you continue to listen for another twenty-five seconds or fifty-five seconds?" And if the answer isn't overwhelmingly yes, you need to rewrite it, because if you don't catch them then, it's not likely they're going to sit still hoping there's going to be a great punch line twenty seconds in. There are too many choices.

That's a good test because it's your audio headline, and anyone who creates direct marketing knows that you can simply change the headline without changing the body copy and increase or decrease your response rate sometimes twenty or thirty times. With radio, you have an audio headline, and it's that first four or five seconds. You need to find a way to get your intended audience to be interested, intrigued, informed, entertained in some way. It might be humorous; it might not be. But find some way to touch their life so they say to themselves that this is going to be important enough, or this is going to be funny enough, or I'm intrigued enough to at least not punch out the station. If you can get them for the first four or five seconds, then your next job is to build it into a whole story with a beginning, middle and end. But that's another half hour discussion.

RAP: Well, let's take a couple of minutes on that. How about a tip on writing stories for commercials?

Jeffrey: Well, one of the exercises that we do is telling stories without words. We have a number of commercials that have been very successful with very few words. If nothing else, it's a reminder to the creator and to their client that you don't need to pack it wall to wall with copy, although you can, and it's a fun technique to do every once in a while. I always say that you have four colors in your radio palette — voices, music, sound effects, and silence, and that's it. With those four colors you can create anything. Especially useful is the judicious use of silence.

Stories Without Words is one exercise I try to do, and this is especially valuable if I'm talking to say, an audio production class or a writing class at a college. Work can be given out as an assignment, and some people have production facilities to be able to go and play in. The assignment is to create a whole story, beginning, middle, and end, just using music and sound effects. We've done four or five of these. One actually

aired on Public Radio here in Iowa, and I think it may have received some national exposure or at least regional exposure. Every once in a while we do it just to see what we can create. The stories are open to interpretation just as abstract art would be open to interpretation, and they are essentially audio paintings for the ear. It's amazing to see how far you can go and how much detail you can create with sound design like that. It's turned out to be a great exercise. I've passed it on to a number of people who teach audio at universities and high schools around the country, and some of them have reported back to me that it's been terrific.

RAP: Why do stories work so well in commercials?

Jeffrey: People love stories. If you think back to who your favorite teacher was, and we all have some favorite teacher, it's probably the one who told the best stories or

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read stories to you. It always was with me. The best and most popular non-fiction books are those that tell stories, human interest stories. Because people love stories so much, every commercial you write in one way or another should be a story, even if it's a "hard sell move the goods out by Monday" radio commercial. If it's a story, it's going to work better because people will be drawn in because we love stories. Even if it's a single-voice commercial or two or three or four voices, if it's a story, it's going to work better.

It should have all the elements of a play, a beginning, a middle and an end. The characters should transition. They should change from the beginning to the end, even if it's one character. If there is some movement in that character's life, attitude, or belief system in that sixty seconds, the audience will be drawn in. They'll be intrigued. They'll be interested. They'll be excited about it. And if you've got two or three characters, there are lots of ways to have the characters changing and interact-

ing. It's that element of change, that element of tension and release, of conflict, and all those things that a good play has, that a good radio commercial should have.

RAP: Excellent! How about another tip for all the writers out there?

Jeffrey: Write for the ear. So many people write for something to be read, an article or a list of things. Newspaper is a wonderful medium. You can cut it out. You can carry it with you. You can compare prices. You can take a look at lists. You can draw circles around things you're interested in. You can put it up with magnets on your refrigerator. It has some very valuable qualities. Radio is not newspaper. Too many people try to put newspaper ads on the radio by listing fifty thousand things or taking forty approaches to the same thing. We've all seen it done over and over again. What we try to do is get away from that. Remember that what you're writing for is the ear.

"Because people love stories so much, every commercial you write in one way or another should be a story."

Here's one way to do it. When you're writing, don't write. Simply pick up one of those hand-held tape recorders and talk it because that internal editor is less likely to jump in and clean it up. Sometimes, whether it's dialogue or whatever, if you're holding a hand-held tape recorder and talking into it, those very first thoughts off the top of your head, which you want to discard, can often be the difference between coming up with something breakthrough or something that's been done before.

For me, it works as a good tool. Some people take to it right away, and some people have tried it and say, "No, I still like the stuff I write with the computer," or with a pencil or whatever. But try writing it the other way, realizing the fact that nobody's going to look at the spelling or the punctuation. You need to write the way people talk.

RAP: Something else writers deal with a lot is writer's block. What techniques of overcoming this work for you?

Jeffrey: I've got a whole series of radio writer's-block busters. One is "targeted listening." It's very simple. You listen to conversations in ways you've never listened to them before. You listen to the patterns of

the way people talk. You try to write a psychological profile. If you're sitting on a plane and you're listening to two people talk, you write a psychological profile of the two of them. Those are two characters for your next radio commercial. Listen to the speech pattern. What's the difference between the way a couple of farmers talk to each other and the way a couple of computer salespeople talk to each other? If you're listening to them on a bus, in a theater, standing in line, or on a plane, and you really target your listening, not just casual listening, but listening for the speech patterns, listening for the way they tell jokes about themselves, listening to what their version of self-effacing humor is, it will be different with every group. Listen to how they talk about their spouses. The way farmers talk about their spouses is different than the way computer salespeople talk about theirs. You end up with speech patterns. You end up with bits of conversation, and you end up with characters that you can then build into your radio commercials.

RAP: What kinds of things do you teach producers about dialogue spots?

Jeffrey: Dialogue is often one of the most difficult kinds of radio commercials to create and have it work. Too often we get two people firing features at each other or at the audience. No one is talking to each other; they are talking at each other. A mistake that often happens is you have two characters in a radio commercial, and they're not reacting to each other. They are reading scripts, and it's very clear to you and to the audience that that is what is happening. If you can design your writing so that one person reacts to what the other person is saying and actually changes their mind as they go along, then you'll end up with something that works a lot better.

I have an exercise I call the dialogue exercise which simply consists of taping a conversation between two or three friends of yours without their knowing it, then transcribing it exactly as it happened, not cleaning it up, not changing the punctuation. Write it down exactly as it happens, and what becomes very clear very soon is that it is not linear. One person does not wait for the next person to talk. Person A talks. Person B interrupts. Person C talks. There are no complete sentences. All three of them talk at the same time, and yet, you, the listener are able to make sense of it.

Then, when you sit down to write your radio commercial, you take a look at this matrix. It's not linear at all because life is

not linear. It's all happening at the same time. You look at this matrix of events, and you realize, the punch line to this joke is when the door opens. And here's somebody who made a comment, and instead of criticizing somebody, they simply cleared their throat. It worked. And so you have all these interactions where you realize that sound effects and music and silence are absolutely as important to that conversation as the words, and sometimes more powerful. The exercise gives you a reminder, and if you do this once a year, that would be a big deal. But you may have to only do it once in your life, and this will improve your dialogue forever.

RAP: I've found that even when you have a good dialogue script, the job's only half done. What about performing it?

Jeffrey: Performing it is another genre completely. I had a chance to do some acting on stage. The performing I did was not just singing and playing; there was a good amount of stand-up comedy built into it. And I had the opportunity to take some acting classes, and that has really changed what I've done. And, finally, there's the old on-the-job training and learning and getting criticism. I've had the opportunity to work a few times with voice coach Marice Tobias, and she's been great. There's always something more to learn about performing. It's interesting. Chuck Blore told me at one time that a lot of radio stations complain about their on-air talent not being good actors. He said, when you look at it, it really comes down in large part to the writing and not the ability of the disk jockey or air personality to act, and it's true. It's not the total answer, but to a larger extent, if the writing were better, the acting would be more believable. When it comes right down to the very basics of what are the skills that are going to make radio commercials better, it's the ability to create imaginatively and effectively those words, and those words often are stage directions. They're not just words. It's knowing where the silence is, and how to interact with the music, and how to interact with the various sound effects, as well as reacting to the other actors in your commercial, because radio commercials are stories.

RAP: You have a well-trained voice and a lot of character voices in your repertoire. What can a person do to help create and develop character voices?

Jeffrey: It is the same thing I mentioned for writing, and that is to listen to other voices, other conversations. There are places I stop

on the way to the airport or wherever because I know there are interesting groups that gather there. There's one place I would stop in every once in a while because I knew it was a place the farmers would gather and have their coffee, and I would just sit there and eavesdrop. Now, if I had the ability to tape it, I would. Then you walk away with that tape or those conversations in your mind and try to mimic the speech patterns and develop some characters that way. Exaggerate them. Tone them down. Try to recreate that person's voice, whether it's male, female, inanimate object, whatever, with your own mouth, and it gives you the ability to play some interesting games. You can combine two of those characters. You can say, okay, here's a Jack Nicholson character, and I'm going to combine that with my Uncle John, who has that weird lisp.

It's based upon real people, and you exaggerate them or tone them down until something works, something is unusual, something is useful. And this doesn't mean creating a series of cartoon voices because there's probably an over-use of that if anything else. You need to create believable voices. You need to be able to tone down those cartoon elements of a person's voice. Tone them down so that it's a regular person because each voice is built around an attitude. What's the attitude? That's more important, actually, than the voice.

Another tip for the voice is swinging that pendulum. If you're going to go in and do a commercial, no matter what the copy is, read it as if you're on the verge of hysterics. I mean just laughing all the way through it. Then read the same thing as if every word is bringing you to tears, the whole thing. You've swung the pendulum both ways. You can then go into your recording session, and you've opened up the pathway a little bit to be more expressive without having to push, to be able to pull back without losing the energy.

But targeted listening is so important. If you're in the radio business, listening to what every room sounds like, every venue sounds like, conversations, speech patterns, is so important. There are just thousands of ideas in each one of our own experiences that can be so valuable if we just pay attention. Again, it's that power of attention. The school is right out there. It's life. Every experience we have is the ability for us to become a better writer, a better creator, a better producer.

RAP: You mentioned an audio book you're working on called "Whole Brain Radio." What is the concept?

Jeffrey: We've heard a lot of radio that's left brain radio, and that's radio that is created assuming that every member of the audience has a complete script and is reading along. There are advertisers who assume that. "That's fourteen-nine-forty-one Ridgeway Highway, four miles east of the 536 overpass." Help! How about, "next to the old post office?" And there's also the ones who want to list everything that they have in their newspaper ad in the commercial.

And then there are those who are right brained. We've heard them. We say, "Gosh. Did you hear that commercial about the guy and the armadillo? Is that funny or what?" "Who is it for?" "I don't know. It's this armadillo, and this guy is like talking to him." "Yeah, who is it for?"

"Whole brain radio works. It integrates the entertainment and the marketing so that you can't pull out the punch line and have it work as a marketing vehicle and you can't pull out the sell and have it work as a joke."

"I don't know, but man, it's funny. God, I love that commercial." Well, it's expensive to do commercials like that, too.

Whole brain radio works. It integrates the entertainment and the marketing so that you can't pull out the punch line and have it work as a marketing vehicle and you can't pull out the sell and have it work as a joke. And that's an ideal to strive for. It's not often reached. I think Dick Orkin has mastered that technique better than anyone else, but that's the idea. When you've got the entertainment, the interest value woven together with the marketing so inextricably that you can't tear them apart, and it works as a whole cloth, that's whole brain radio. It really affects both parts of your brain. It comes out of both aspects of the writing process, and it works.

RAP: You use sound effects a lot in your work. What are some of the more unique things you've done with sound effects?

Jeffrey: Some of the most interesting sound effects are the ones that don't exist. In space there are no sounds, and yet every Star Trek and Star Wars movie is complete

with many hundreds of sounds. Once, we had to create the sound of window film adhering to glass. We'll Foley a lot, and we'll combine sound effects from different libraries and manipulate them digitally in lots of ways. But oftentimes, creating our own sound effects is sometimes the most effective. We'll combine various sound effects that we've recorded and/or created and combine them with existing sound effects from libraries or just combine them with several of our own Foleyed sound effects. We had to create the sound of someone having a heart attack. We did it with music and sound. Those kinds of things that there are no sounds for are sometimes the most fun.

RAP: In the literature on your presentations you mention using sound effects as seeds and locators. What is this about?

Jeffrey: One of the things I try to remind audiences, especially audiences that haven't done a lot of radio, is that when you want to create the sound of a phone ringing, it doesn't have to ring much at all. I mean, it's just the beginning of a ring and a pickup and you're there. Oftentimes, someone who is just doing radio for the first time will have that thing ring three or four times. If you're looking for that annoying effect where there's no one there, then it can be used as an effect, but, generally, little quarter second, tenth second "seeds" will create the effect of much longer events. In my presentations, I'll give the example of creating a whole Hawaiian vacation in fifteen seconds where you've got the sound of the phone ringing, someone going out, closing the door, getting in the car, the sound of the car--and each of these sounds is only a part of a second--and you get the sound of the airport, the sound of the plane taking off, the sounds of inside the cabin, a couple of announcements, the plane lands. There's Hawaiian music. There's surf, and you're there. It's only taken a few seconds. So what happens is that you plant each one of these little seeds, and the audience compresses the time. They're used to doing this. They know it would take thirteen hours to get from the east coast to Hawaii. It's happened in fifteen seconds, and they understand that. They got it. So in that way, sound effects can be used as seeds.

Here's something else you can do with sounds. Let's say it's a story and you're hinting at something that's going to happen at the end with little drop-in sound effects all through the story. Then, when you hear it at the end, it makes sense. You can do that with voices, too, with a background

voice which keeps trying to get into the commercial but doesn't and finally appears at the end as a punch line. And without telling people we're at the airport, you can simply use airport sound effects, and there's your "locator" that tells you where you are.

You can also use simple stereo panning and little doppler effects and changes in the equalization to move people around in that room that you've created for your radio commercial on that stage and have all kinds of activity and depth of field, all of which will draw that audience in and make it more interesting for their ear. There are times when we'll create radio commercials that are so complex, we'll actually draw out a whole stage diagram showing where sound effects change as someone comes in, walks up to where the camera in that radio commercial is focused, and then moves away. Someone else moves in, and somebody is in the back in a corner. Add a little doppler effect as a dog runs through the room or whatever. Sometimes you need to draw all that out to make sure you've mixed it all correctly. But when it's done, it's a very interesting tableau.

At the same time, that kind of large production does not make it more effective than a single voice, the right voice, telling a wonderful story. The simplest commercial can outpull the most complex commercial or the most expensive commercial on radio. You can't do that with television because television is so dependent on the production value, and that's one of the powers of radio. But the right voice and the right words, that's all you need to make it work, and that's often forgotten because of all these great digital effects we've got. Let's use them! It's like eating too much sugar.

RAP: If you could do anything differently with your career, what would you do?

Jeffrey: Probably take more chances. I often end my presentations with this. I say, "You know, all the things I've told you today you can take as rules and add them to all the rules everybody else has already given you, a hundred and twenty-five words in a sixty-second commercial, and make sure you do this, and make sure you do that. As soon as you start breaking those rules in a major way, you'll start coming up with breakthrough radio commercials. Safe radio is dull radio. Radio created by committee is dull radio. Outrageous radio often is good, not always, but often. Sometimes those first stream of consciousness ideas are the best." These are the things I remind people of.

At one point, if anybody had said, "Okay, here's my idea. I get some really corny country and western music, I mean really hokey, and then I have this guy who almost bumbles through his words. He's very laconic, sort of a story teller, but not really. He's kind of a country backwoods guy and he just tells little stories over this hokey music. What do you think? Think it will work to sell things for like a major hotel chain?" Well, Motel 6 is one of the longest running, strongest result getting campaigns in the history of radio. And yet, if you thought about it, the idea would make no sense. "Are you kidding me?"

***"Take more chances.
That's where the most
fun comes from."***

Forget it." And yet it has spawned more imitators; it has spawned more hotel and motel advertising probably than anything else. It's been a great booster of radio. It's been a very successful story because nobody had done it before. It was definitely off the wall. It was taking a chance, but it's brilliant. It's brilliantly written. It's not just dashed off copy. It's very carefully, methodically thought out, and Tom Bodet is a wonderful story teller. There are a lot of very well planned out elements, but its basic idea is off the wall. And there are thousands more ideas even stranger waiting there that people are wasting by saying, "Yeah, but no, I don't think so."

Take more chances. That's where the most fun comes from. Take those chances and see what happens.

RAP: Any parting thoughts for our readers?

Jeffrey: The Creative Directors of the radio stations should be participating in some kind of seminar for local advertisers in a city. The broadcasting groups can do that. There are all kinds of ways that you can network with advertising agencies and put together an advertising day where the Creative Director from a billboard company, a television company, a newspaper company, and the radio station get together and talk about creating for their specific media. There are lots of ways they can do what I'm doing, if they enjoy going out there and speaking, that can generate confidence in business for the radio station. I think there are ways they can take all the

material that is in your magazine and apply a lot of it.

Sometimes people look at something and ignore it because they think it doesn't apply to them. But if you apply that to your individual market and individual advertisers, all these ideas are very valuable to increasing the number of advertisers you have, making the ones you have happier, getting more business, and making it more fun for the Production Director.

I think the Production Directors, the writers, producers, casting people, whoever you've got on your production staff, should be participating more in that sale. And by participating, I mean creatively participating and financially participating. It's one of the biggest overlooked money-making profit centers in every radio station in the country, and more station owners need to wake up to that fact. I think some are, and I think we're going to see some pretty exciting things happen. And when it happens in a market, it's going to be tough to be number two because whoever thinks of it first and does a great job with it is going to dominate that position in the advertiser's mind in that market.

There is an opportunity for the Production Directors to maybe put together a proposal, maybe network with the salespeople. I haven't thought out how all this could be done yet, but the potential is there to do some truly wonderful things. Take some of the things that the Metro Radio Group from England has done so successfully by using the "creative-led sell" and apply that in part, at least, to some of the selling that's done. If you haven't heard Metro Radio's presentations, call RAB and ask to find out if they have some tapes of them. They do a tremendous job showing how they've increased their business many, many, many times simply by spending the money and effort and time to train writers and producers, to get voices, to make creativity the prime selling factor in increasing their business. It's a brilliant idea and it works tremendously.

Our thanks to Jeffrey for this month's info-packed interview. Jeffrey welcomes your comments and questions.

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