

# Ad Ventures

## THE BASICS OF COPYWRITING

• As proprietor of a fully self-contained production house or recording/performing/marketing company, you have to know the different elements of preparing broadcast advertisements. From time to time we've examined equipment, explored techniques for people who work at or with radio stations, and in the last *Ad Ventures* I devoted this space to a potpourri of handy tips for greenhorns, hackers, and even some ideas for you old stalwarts who still toil in primitive studios. So, what should we get into next? Most db readers are fairly clear on how to use their equipment, and if you're a musician, there's no way I can teach you anything new about composition, arranging, and playing synthesizers and stuff. So here comes a short course on how to write copy for radio commercials.

I've often stated that radio spots have to be designed to motivate a listener to react instantly by simply showing up on the sponsor's doorstep, cash in hand.

Although some radio and TV spots are referred to as direct response ads ("Call 1-800-555-1234 right now and use your credit card to order..."), most of the commercials you produce will be of a more indefinite nature. They'll be one of three other basic types:

1) Those geared toward a future event (Party at the Vile Inn this Saturday with the Spandex Geeks and two drinks for the price of one...")

2) Information on an event or sale that the sponsor hopes customers will look into ("Uncle Drippy's Used Groceries is holding its monthly going-out-of-business sale now through Saturday and all prices are slashed up to fifty percent...")

3) A public awareness or image spot (Drink Burpo Cola because it's more fun than falling into a vat of battery acid...")

Unlike direct response commercials, these advertisements rarely sell products; they just bring prospective patrons to the merchant's door. The most important single element of a radio commercial is the "copy," or script that the announcer(s) will read.

### BELIEVING IN THE PRODUCT

When you set out to write a commercial, your first step is to believe in what you are doing. If you hold the opinion that advertising is generally an enterprise of bull, hype, unethical, or amoral damage to society, and noise pollution, then stop reading now and forget about the potential income you might gain from cutting commercials. It's true that, unfortunately, not all advertising is good, but it isn't all necessarily evil, either. The ads you write will be informative, helpful, honest, and profitable for the listener/customer as well as the retailer.

To prepare a good commercial, you must care about the merchandise. Get to know the product you are selling. (We'll call anything advertised a "product," whether it's an actual piece of

tangible merchandise, a car wash, a movie, an accounting service, an insurance policy, a bank, a store, or a rock concert.) The idea is to present a convincing argument for why the listener should try it. The best approach is to treat him or her as a friend. You can't convince a friend to invest in something you don't personally believe in. You also can't convince a friend to try something that you've never tried or seen for yourself. So, the first step is to research the product. Find out what it's called, what it does, how it works, how much it costs, how it came into being, and why people who use it will benefit.

Next, you must understand the target market. Who is most likely to buy the product? What type of music appeals to them? What sort of language do they respond to? What are their main interests and concerns? After you've identified the market, seek out any obstacles there may be to selling it. Is it overpriced? Too revolutionary? Is there a better product offered by a competitor? Does everyone already have one? Is it dangerous? Is it just plain boring?

You have to write copy that will do four things:

- 1) Get attention.
- 2) Point out the customer's need for the product.
- 3) Describe the product in a clear and exciting way that shows how well the product fulfills that need.
- 4) Stimulate action.

If the copy doesn't grab the listener's attention and hold it, you're licked from the start.

### WRITING EFFECTIVE COPY

How do you get "up" for writing an ad? Easy: start writing. Nothing tricky about that, is there? Pretend you're writing a letter to a friend, and that you sincerely want to convince your friend that he or she desperately needs the product. Just write it out. Use free-form, random, stream-of-consciousness terminology, spontaneous vocabulary, and positive expressions. Let go of your natural urge to write



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**24 HOUR PHONE DEMO LINE: (404) 482-2485**

"perfect" sentences, and toss words onto the page as quickly as they pop into your head. It's much easier to edit and clean up your writing later than it is to get the stuff down in the first place.

Once you've got some thoughts scribbled out, here are the four key points to incorporate in all effective copy:

Rule 1) Get Attention. What's the first positive thought that comes to mind when you picture the product? Be specific; don't just say it "works great." What do you mean by "great?" And how does it "work?" Sex is great, and so is driving a well-made automobile, yet they appeal to somewhat different desires. Get to the bottom of the matter right from the top. A powerful ad might start by saying that you'll "never have to wash your car again" if you use Glop-Max Car Wax. Now, that's a grabber. I'd want to know more.

Rule 2) Point Out A Need. What will this product do for me? Tell me why I want to have it. For example, almost everyone likes a shiny car, since it looks better and keeps the finish from wearing off. But shiny cars require hard work. You either pour on the elbow grease or fork out the bucks to have someone else do it.

Rule 3) Describe The Product And Show How Well It Fulfills The Need. Be precise and explicit; paint a word picture. Exactly what is this product and what benefit does it offer? Perhaps it's "the only non-toxic car wax that tastes like beef, so your neighbor's dog will do the buffing for you." If I view waxing my car as a bothersome chore, this just might be for me.

Rule 4) Stimulate Action. Tell the listener exactly what he must do to get this product. Give him an easy-to-remember description of when and where it can be purchased. "See your Glop-Max dealer" is too vague; why not say, "Pick up a can of Glop-Max at Greasy Gil's Auto Supply across from the Landfill Mall. On sale this Saturday only." That's likely to set me in motion, since I can mentally picture myself driving over and getting some.

If your advertising copy covers these four points, you will rarely fail to pull in a respectable number of customers, assuming that the product is halfway decent and that the advertisements are reaching the right audience.

These are the mere rudiments to get you going. The art of writing good, effective advertising copy occupies volumes of books and magazine articles. Just remember that a creative idea can be revised, edited, and reworked to fit the above guidelines, and in a future column, I'll list some specific copywriting "do's and don'ts" as well as a few more general rules.

#### TALKBACK MIC

Since the last *Ad Ventures*, I've been bringing a wheelbarrow on my daily visits to the Post Office. In fact, several dozen recording professionals have requested particulars on my forthcoming audio cassette program *How To Produce Great Radio Commercials*. My work on that project was slightly delayed by a badly broken ankle back in July (I was safe at second, though, and we won the game...as well as our second consecutive league title), and some heavy business travel. But, I've really been on the case and the master tapes will be done any day now. If you've written to me, I promise you'll get a personal letter from me as soon as the program is available, and I'll also be putting out advertisements and product announcements through as many trade publications as possible (including db). Thanx for your patience...A big welcome to Jon Rees, our new video producer at CareerTrack

Publications in Boulder, CO. Good luck and may CareerTrack be your success company...Lots of readers sent in comments about the tips in the July/August issue: Thanks to Jeffrey P. Hedquist of Hedquist Productions, Inc. in Fairfield, Iowa. I enjoyed the innovative commercials on your demo tape, and I appreciate your suggestion. (I recommended putting masking tape on reels so you can write on it to identify the contents without leaving everlasting hieroglyphics on your reels. Jeff says he's left masking tape on for long periods and had it stick a little too permanently. He suggests you try Scotch 256 white paper tape or 3M cover-up tape #658 to put on reels so that you can write on 'em without marking the reels up permanently.) Stu Engelke, Chief Engineer at WZZD-AM in Lafayette Hill, PA notes that marking tape for splices as shown in Tip #4, Figure 3 will not only keep you from messing up your heads, but also tells you which end of a piece of tape is the beginning. Stu, that should help a lot of us avoid edits that sound like they belong on the Beatle's *White Album*...Hello to Robert Long of Optimum Sound in Little Rock, AR. I hope Allen Schultz's audio signal tracer can help you in your live sound work. Much obliged for your kind words about *Ad Ventures*, too...Regards to Carl Dansky of Sounds All Right! in Poughkeepsie, NY for your complimentary note. We at db always welcome a new subscriber. I hope to hear from you again when you get a typewriter!

Anybody else want to get into the act? Contact me directly by writing care of db, or drop a note to me at PO Box 17386, Boulder, CO 80308-7386. I answer everybody here in the column, and I love to receive demo cassettes of what you're doing!



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Stamford, CT 06906 U.S.A.  
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