



# Converting Your “Anti-Creative” Clients

If I had a nickel for every time an account executive handed in a copy request with a caveat mandating a “straight read,” I would have amassed a few hundred bucks by now. Maybe not enough for an early retirement on Maui, but if you crunch the numbers, it’s staggering.

Here are a few reasons clients are gun-shy when it comes to creative spots:

1. To them, their business is the most interesting thing in the world. How could anyone not be entranced by a 60-second exposition on the new chiropractic table that eliminates the need for back surgery? Or the fascinating world of energy-efficient HVAC systems? How about those new menu items at Jimmy’s Buffet-O-Rama? So why gild the lily? Just tell them about it, and they’ll come.
2. They think that creative is another word for wacky. Off the wall. Not serious.
3. They think listeners will miss the message because it will be lost in the entertainment.
4. They’ve been burned before. Doing good, solid, creative work isn’t a science; it’s an art form. Sometimes, work meant to break through the clutter merely breaks through the eardrums.
5. They don’t know why, they just don’t like it.

So how can you convert an anti-creative client? Here’s what works for me.

**Define your terms.** When clients say they don’t want anything creative, ask specifically what they mean by “creative.” Often, you’ll hear words like wacky, goofy, off-the-wall, pushing the envelope, outside the box. Make it clear that creative doesn’t necessarily mean raucous. Explain that:

- A dramatic spot, even a straight read that resonates with strong emotions, is creative.
- A spot using underscore music as an additional character is creative.
- Creating testimonials by digitally editing non-scripted customer dialogue is creative.
- Judicious use of sound effects to take listeners on a theater-of-the-mind journey is creative.
- Using believable slice-of-life dialogue is creative.

**Define their terms.** Ask them to recall any radio commercial they especially liked. Nine times out of 10, it won’t be a straight read. “A-ha,” you say, “so the commercial you like best isn’t a straight read. It’s creative. Interesting.” This can lead to a Eureka! moment that will move them in a new direction.

**Reel ‘em in.** Before you craft their spot, play them a reel of

no more than three spots that define your concept of creativity. This works especially well with clients who automatically think of over-the-top humor as the definition of creative. Play dramatic spots, sound-effect spots, even humorous spots, but avoid tacky and wacky.

**Give them options.** The company I work for strongly believes the old axiom on success in radio advertising: It’s what you say as well as how many times you say it. Thus, we routinely do spec and demo spots as part of our “try before you buy” core culture. If I’m dealing with a client who has a penchant for dry, single-voice commercials, I will do exactly as has been requested, and then do one my way.

**Ask them which of the two they like better.** Chances are, you’ll like the answer. But if that isn’t the case, give it the “taste test.” Ask the client to a) let their staff hear both versions and render an opinion, and b)

let some customers do the same. This can have amazing results, if it isn’t done in a confrontational manner.

Bear in mind that the process isn’t foolproof. Some clients will always believe in the Law of Conservation of Creativity: For every great creative vision, there will always be an equal and opposite revision.

Even a tiny tugboat can turn the largest cruise ship. In the long run, you and the client want the same thing — a commercial that works. ☛

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