



## Finding The Right Creative Niche

The first hurdle a creative services director has to overcome when considering niche marketing is, do you pronounce it *nitch* or *neesh*? Once you've gotten past that "I say tomato, you say tomahto" moment, the fun begins.

Every creative services director deals with target audiences of varying demographic composition. This is especially true if there's a group of stations involved. I write and produce spots for Classical Music, Country, Hardcore Classic Rock, Adult Contemporary Classic Rock, Sports, and Progressive-Talk formats. Not a homogeneous group.

Within that broad spectrum of lifestyles and mindsets exist subsets that advertisers often want to address. Which I'll get to in a moment. But I'm going to discount, out of hand, ethnic niche marketing, which is a whole other can of worms.

While working in South Florida in the 70s, when the huge trend of stations flipping to Spanish formats began, I learned early on that this type of niche marketing requires a degree of specialization best left to experts. English copy does not translate well into Spanish, and this primarily has to do with linguistic barriers. The classic story is the rocket scientist marketing guru at General Motors who decided to export North America's popular Chevy Nova to Latin America. Guess nobody told him that the phrase *no va* in Spanish means "does not go."

But it's not just language, it's culture. A Caribbean airline I worked on wanted to initiate service between Miami and the isle St. Maarten, renowned for its beautiful fauna. They commissioned world-famous artist Alexander Calder to paint its 727s with gorgeous butterflies. The service was dubbed The Butterfly Express, and the phrase was translated directly into Spanish. Only no one told the primarily Dutch-speaking airline marketers that macho Latino males would balk at boarding a plane so named. An Anglo approximation would be Pansy Express.

It pays to bring in experts.

What I do deal with on a regular basis is niche marketing that targets a select group of people with very specific interests. Motorcycle riders. Paintball enthusiasts. Campers. Quilters. Antiquers. Baseball card collectors. Martial artists. Birders. Snowboarders. Numismatists. Skydivers. Hot air balloonists.

These are all niches for which I've created ads, and they all had two things in common: I knew very little about them when handed the assignment, and I didn't learn all that much from the account executive or the business owner.

So here's my game plan for niche-market radio spots.

**1. If time allows, go to the store and chat with customers.** Get into their heads. They have a passion for this product/service. Catch a bit of the fever, firsthand.



**2. The Internet is God's gift to copywriters. Don't be frugal with Google.** You need a good generic grounding in your niche market, and Internet research can provide it.

**3. Learn to speak the "language."** Whether it's karate, downhill racing, motocross, or coffee roasting, there's a lexicon/jargon/slang/patois that its enthusiasts use with each other.

**4. Get the syntax right.** Learning the words isn't enough. Make sure that when you use them, the context is spot on.

**5. Do not rely on the movies or TV.** The last time Hollywood actually got it right when it comes to resonating with the culture, Frank Capra was still sitting in the director's chair. Niche-marketed movies are often disdained by the very targets they're looking to capture. (I can't think of a single movie I've ever seen about the advertising business that actually reminded me of an agency where I'd worked.)

**6. If possible, preview your spot with the client's customers to see if they feel it's "talking to them."**

The only time I ever drove a motorcycle was a rental on the island of Bonaire. The isle makes a sharp, boomerang right turn. I discovered that motorcycles traveling at 60 mph need to be driven a certain way in order to make a boomerang right turn. I drove mine off the road, down the spit of beach, into the ocean. And yet, for all that, I recently managed to portray a hardcore biker in a radio spot that worked fantastically for the client, using steps 1 through 6 above. If you'd like to hear it, e-mail me and I'll send you the MP3. 📧

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