



Steinberg On Creative

By Steven J. Steinberg

Take Advantage Of The Echo Effect

Your Client's Own Words Are Often The Ones Easiest To Get Approved

Capturing your clients' own words and then using them in future commercials is a great way to bring their stories to listener-prospects and make it easier for creative services to get spots approved.

A few weeks ago, I met with a client and the AE handling her account at the client's charming antiques store, gift shop, and art gallery. Working as I do in northern New England, charming antiques stores, gift shops, and art galleries are about as ubiquitous as diners in New Jersey. Therein lay a major problem — what made this place special?

In client meetings, my role as creative services director is more than one of familiarization and fact gathering. As a firm believer that every client has a unique story to tell, I try to elicit, in the client's own words, just what that point of differentiation might be. In this meeting, as I almost always do, I employed a process.

USE THE RIGHT TOOLS

The best way to do this is by using a small recording device, with the client's knowledge, and then having an informal conversation. I don't take notes. I do more listening than talking. And I keep coming back, often from oblique angles, to what the client thinks makes this particular business unique, what the client thinks the customers' take on this is, and why repeat customers keep coming back for more.

The recorder serves a dual purpose. First, it allows for a more organic, free-flowing conversation, compared to frantically scribbling notes. It allows for good eye contact, which encourages the dialogue to move along and allows me to see body language, which often emphasizes key points. Second, it promotes easier retention of the whole process, creating a comfort zone with the knowledge that every point can be recalled verbatim if necessary.

LESS IS MORE

Even the most laconic business owners will spend more time than needed discussing their great passion — their business. Since I know I'm going to replay the entire tape before I begin typing the spot, I make it a practice to keep these input sessions focused on one thing only, the client's **unique selling proposition**. Gathering and disseminating all the other mandatory bits of data

is the responsibility of the account executive. It should not take more than 15 minutes to get all this down on tape.

IT'S BETTER THE SECOND TIME AROUND

Before writing the spot, I play back the entire conversation. Now is the time to make notes. With the pause/rewind/fast-forward functions at your fingertips, this is an easy task.

LOOK FOR KEY PHRASES

In my meeting with the antiques/gift/gallery storeowner, she said something that caught my attention. They had a metal-working artisan who took antique cutlery and turned it into something entirely different — napkin rings, candlesticks, even jewelry. I made note of her exact phrase: "He recycles what most people would think of as junk and turns it into something exciting, vibrant, and new."

It became one of the lynchpins of the commercial, because I remembered the sparkle in the client's eyes when she showed me some of the handiwork and commented that her customers couldn't get enough of it. She had ad-libbed that line to me, and I put it in the spot, practically verbatim.



THE ECHO EFFECT

The timeframe between the input meeting with the client and her reading the finished script was just a few days. In that time, she probably forgot the exact words she'd conveyed to me, which I had taped. But when the AE called me shortly after bringing the script over, she reported that I had "nailed it." And that the shop owner especially liked the part about the recycled silverware. Even the account executive didn't remember that I had merely echoed back her client's own words.

It isn't disingenuous to use the echo effect to avoid revisions or rewrites. Creative services has a mission to find the client's passion, and make it part of the story to be told. Using the right tools, cherry-picking the right phrases, then converting them into good copy isn't a shortcut or gimmick. It's good business. 📁

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