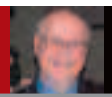


By Steven J. Steinberg

Steinberg On Creative



Creative Services: Get With The Program

Creating The Right Match-Up Between Commercials And Formats

As I've mentioned in earlier columns, I am the sole writer for a radio group that includes a hard-core rocker, an AC classic rock station, an AC country station, a classical music network, an AM sports format, and an AM progressive talk station. Clients often want to run ads on more than one of our stations — which begs the question, does this require a different creative approach and production for each format? The answer isn't simple, because there are two factors at play.

First, there's the elemental fact that what sounds good on one format won't on another — a commercial that's going to run immediately after Bach probably won't work right after Bachman-Turner Overdrive. The listeners of a head-banging LZ Deuce/Audio Slave hard rocker will be totally different than those for a conservative Talk station. From a programmer's perspective, it stands to reason that a commercial with a very upbeat, excited read featuring a matching high-energy piece of underscore music won't work on a classical music station because, to the listener, it would be jarring. This is where creative services needs to be sensitive to the program director's concerns. Some match-ups work, some don't. I often just change the underscore music to make a better fit to a particular programming format. A relaxed read on my classical network might have one type of underscore, where the same exact voice-over might have a different music track on the country station. However, a commercial can work equally as well on a country station as it does on a heavy metal station if the demographics match up. It isn't all that difficult to craft a story that will work in a variety of formats.

And from the standpoint of the client's best interests, it's better when you do. Success in radio is measured by what you say and how many times you say it. While there's a never-ending argument as to what exactly the optimum frequency per listener per week ought to be, the fact is, if a spot is heard by the same listener three times on a country station and four times on a sports station, it's still a frequency of seven. If there was a different spot for each station, that frequency is basically cut in half.

The hardest "fit" I've ever had to make was for our classical network. In all my years in broadcasting, I'd never

worked with a commercially sponsored classic music format until I began my current position in Maine two years ago. When I arrived, some preconceived notions needed to be examined carefully. If every commercial on a classical music station sounds laid back, in the same tonality as the announcer letting you know you just heard *Tocata and Fugue in D Minor* by J.S. Bach, chances are your advertisers are not going to be happy. But it's not impossible to break through the clutter without breaking faith with your listening audience's sensibilities.

Second, different formats often appeal to different demographic groups. As I mentioned earlier, the same client's story needs to be told in a different fashion depending on demographics. Many formats skew more toward men than women, and vice versa. A good example would be a store offering fast oil changes. Women and men both drive cars. All cars need oil changes. But the way in which I would tell the story to women is different than the way I'd tell it to men. From a programming standpoint, based on the demographic make up of the audience, I would write two different commercials, not because of the content differences, but because of the audience make up.

So here's my advice:

- Remember that every radio station has two sets of clients: advertisers and listeners. Don't make an adversary of the programming department. It's easier to seek a happy medium than you might think.
- Wherever possible, don't write two different spots. Frequency is frequency, even if split between stations.
- If you're using an ad for two very different formats, consider changing the underscore music, using a similar tempo, but different flavor. That way, a spot running on an all-news station can easily run on a country format.
- Demographics trump content. Don't try to make one commercial serve two different target audiences.
- Creative services works best for both the client and the listener when you "get with the program." 📧

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