



Steinberg On Creative

By Steven J. Steinberg

Revising How You Do Revisions

How To Rewrite The Spot Without Loosing Your Creative Vision

I call it the Law of Conservation of Creativity: For every great creative vision, there will always be an equal and opposite revision. This has been true since the penning of the very first radio commercial, a salient point now that we're celebrating the medium's centennial year.

There are three categories of re-writing a radio commercial.

1. Your client really doesn't like the concept, the whole idea behind the commercial, and you need to start from square one. By definition, then, you're not revising the concept, you're abandoning ship.

2. Your client likes the concept, but needs to change things substantively. Perhaps you have made claims that need to be deleted or inserted information that simply isn't accurate. Most often, you've left something out that needs to be in. This can require a major overhaul.

3. The client likes the concept and most of the writing, but has minor changes to make.



THE MAJOR OVERHAUL

Client changes are inevitable. Even if you address every concern in the copy request, your client may realize after reading the script that something's amiss, or missing. It's up to creative services to make the changes *without* changing the concept.

If the changes are massive, however, the concept might not survive. The whole point of having a concept, rather than simply intoning a bunch of selling points or prices, is to tell the client's story in an arresting, interesting way.

An example: a seafood restaurant in South Florida, so fantastic that a polar bear swims down from the Arctic Circle just to check it out. Obviously, a hyperbole comedy spot. What moves the concept forward is the disbelief of the restaurant's hostess at their newest patron, and the polar bear's matter-of-fact attitude. Throw in a few sample entrees to back up the bear's trek, his comments about the ambiance, and you've got yourself a good spot.

But the client decides that there must be more to it. He wants the restaurant's hours on weekdays and weekends, the fact that there's live music every Friday, a mention of major credit cards accepted, a few sentences about their bar with large-screen TVs to watch the games on Sunday, and early bird specials every weekday from 2 to 5 p.m.

Suddenly, what had been a compelling "reason to believe" commercial with a very listenable concept is packed with

information that just doesn't fit the concept. And it can't be tweaked to make it right.

HAVE THE COURAGE TO JUST SAY NO

The temptation is to go with the client-is-always-right paradigm and force the square peg into the round hole. But if your gut tells you the concept will no longer live and breathe, tell the client so. Tell them that you've created a strategic branding, imaging, and positioning commercial for them, because based on

your understanding of their needs, that's what they had asked for. Be clear that this new information makes it more of a tactical commercial. Act as a marketing partner. Explain that you'd be happy to write a different commercial containing all those relevant points, but it won't work within the framework you've presented. And be prepared to write a new spot. My experience has been that clients don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water, and will heed my advice.

WHEN CHANGE IS BOTH INEVITABLE AND PRACTICAL

When discussing minor changes in an existing concept, I give my account executive colleagues this admonition: If something new comes in, something old comes out.

The gestalt, the sum total of a commercial, isn't merely the words, it's the timing and nuance. Additions to a good commercial, if quid pro quo deletions aren't made, throw that pacing way off. I invite the client to help decide where those deletions fall. By making them part of the process at that point, you avoid a potential third round of changes.

You can also look to creating an economy of words in the conceptual portion of the spot, as long as you don't eviscerate the creativity, to help make those additions work.

Revisions are a normal part of the creative services process. Once you embrace that fact and build a template that allows you to act in true partnership with your clients, it removes the sting of rejection. Best of all, it lets you craft a spot that satisfies the needs of the client and your own sense of creativity. 📺

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