



Spectacular Results From Spec Spots

Maximizing The Return On Investment On Trial Balloon Commercials

On my first day on the job with the company that now employs me, I was shown the office recently vacated by the previous creative services director. A handwritten sign above the door jamb defiantly proclaimed, “NO &%#@ SPEC SPOTS!” I removed the offensive and offending proclamation, knowing as I did that this was one of the main reasons there was a new sheriff in town.

The philosophy of my management team mirrored my own: Spec spots work, and they need to be an active part of the creative services arsenal. My predecessor’s recalcitrance at doing speculative commercials was something made abundantly clear to both the sales staff and management. It’s an issue at many radio stations, where creative services’ time allotment is a crucial resource.

So one of my responsibilities as creative services director for a large group of stations is to produce spec spots to help close deals. Please note the use of the word *spots*. I’m not talking about scripts. When I speak of spec spots, I’m referring to fully produced commercials. A spec spot is used primarily to move an otherwise undecided client — someone who more often than not has not been on the radio before — into signing a contract.


Here’s my case for spec spots.

- 1. WE SHOULD DO SPEC SPOTS BECAUSE, UNLIKE VIRTUALLY EVERY OTHER COMMUNICATIONS MEDIUM, WE CAN.** Newspapers and television stations/cable companies cannot afford to produce speculative advertising; the production costs just don’t warrant the risk of failure. This gives radio a huge edge that must be exploited. Radio spec spots simply require the time it takes to write a script and voice it. The work is done in-house, with no cost of materiel, save, perhaps, a blank CD.
- 2. SPEC SPOTS CREATE A VERSION OF REALITY THAT CLIENTS BUY INTO.** When a prospective client hears a produced commercial, a new reality emerges. It’s no longer a question of the client wondering how a spot would sound. It now exists. So the only remaining issue is whether the client is willing to forego having that commercial reach its intended target audience, or let it disappear into limbo.

- 3. A SPEC SPOT LEAVES NOTHING TO THE IMAGINATION.** Unlike a script, which many erstwhile prospects may find uninspired or open to interpretation, a fully produced spec spot is the embodiment of “what you hear is what you get.”
- 4. A SPEC SPOT CREATES A “WHAT IF I DON’T?” SCENARIO.** Once a client hears a produced spot, if the decision is made not to sign a contract and go on the air with it, that nagging doubt can grow into full-blown regret. Which is why I always recommend leaving the CD with the client if the result isn’t a signed deal.
- 5. A SPEC SPOT THAT’S TURNED DOWN BY CLIENT A CAN BE USED BY CLIENT B.** I have no problem telling a client that “we think this concept works especially well for someone in your product/service category and we wanted to offer it to you first,” as a selling ploy. If the commercial is especially good, the prospect might find it unsettling to think that instead of his business’s name in the commercial, it could conceivably be that of the competition, if the deal isn’t closed.
- 6. SOME TIPS:**
 - Spec spots are only for prospects on the fence. They are not a prospecting tool. A spec spot isn’t something you bring to a first meeting with a client. It is designed to close a deal, not open discussions.
 - Make sure, at the end of any spec spot you leave with a client, that you put in a copyright disclaimer — something like, “The preceding commercial is copyrighted (year) and is the sole intellectual property rights of (station/group) and may not be used in whole or in part without express permission of (station/group).”
 - Don’t e-mail MP3s of spec spots to clients. A spec should be presented formally.
 - Don’t drop off a spec spot for the client to listen to later. If the client isn’t available, reschedule the appointment.
 - After the presentation, make sure the client realizes that this is a work in progress and can be altered and adapted to meet specific needs.

The bottom line is, spec isn’t a burden or hassle. It’s a spectacular marketing tool that can bring in business you might otherwise never see come across the threshold. If you’re open to doing spec spots, you can expect to close a lot of deals. ☞

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- Spec spots should be an active part of the creative services arsenal.
- A spec spot is used primarily to move an otherwise undecided client into signing a contract. It is not a prospecting tool.
- A spec turned down by client A can be used by client B.
- Make sure the client realizes this is a work in progress.