



Steinberg On Creative

By Steven J. Steinberg

Creative Outsourcing

When It Makes Sense To Pay For Outside Creative

I've made the case in a previous column for in-house creative services as an alternative to letting your sales staff or production wizards write copy. But I realize that smaller stations and/or groups may not be in a bottom-line position to add a mid-range salary to the red side of the balance sheet.

There was a time when many radio stations considered having a creative services department as anathema to their community footprint. Much of their total business came across the threshold from local advertising agencies fronting local businesses.

However, as "local direct" became the bacon that most stations brought home, the truly savvy GMs and GSMs realized they needed a value-added service to grow their clients' businesses. So more and more stations and groups began adding a creative services department to their table of organization.

If you don't have a full-fledged creative services department, there are times to consider outsourcing.

WHEN TO RELY ON OUTSIDE CREATIVE HELP

Just listen for the "rap rap rap" of opportunity knocking. Not all accounts are created equal. While it would be foolish to pay for outside creative in order to write and produce a spot for a short flight of a new or existing client, there are some situations in which loosening the purse strings makes sense. Bear in mind, you are already used to paying a commission to salespeople for bringing business on board. If you think of outside creative fees as small, one-time commissions on new or additional business, it's highly palatable. Here are three examples:

1. An existing client who spends a lot of money with you isn't happy with the current level of creativity of the spots you're producing, and they're not working. You're worried a rival station with good creative services will make its move.

2. A prospect with the potential to sign a long-term/annual



Beware of refugees from the high school A/V department

contract has a heart for radio, but not necessarily your station. You need an advantage.

3. You want to target a category/niche of potential advertisers, like high-end auto dealerships, chiropractors, jewelers, etc., and want some large-caliber ammunition, other than one-sheets, to entice them. This is a your-name-goes-here type spot.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF OUTSIDE CREATIVE HELP?

National/regional advertisers and ad agencies rely on a small coterie of fantastic radio production houses in Los Angeles, Atlanta, New York, and other commercial meccas, even the UK. I'll go out on a limb

and state that the creative fees these power-hitters charge are way beyond the budget of radio stations and groups.

If you Google "radio commercial production" you'll find over 14 million links. Some of those will include major leaguers like The Famous Radio Ranch founded by the legendary Dick Orkin, with grand-slam home run rate cards. At the other end of the spectrum you'll discover two refugees from the high school A/V department with an old Wollensak T-1500 reel-to-reel tape deck, whose rates are directly proportional to their talent.

HOW TO CHOOSE?

The great thing about looking online for outside creative help is that (a) if the providers don't have clickable examples of their work to peruse, run away; and (b) it's easy to separate the good from the bad and the ugly. There's no longer any need to wait for the arrival of a CD sample; as Carrie Fisher once remarked, "The trouble with instant gratification is that it takes too long." So let your ears decide, and then get a quote.

HOW MUCH?

The big guys can charge upwards of \$5,000 for a commercial, which may or may not include a talent buy out. I can state with authority that there are very talented production companies, such as my own Theater of Steve's Mind, that can produce a great spot for a tiny fraction of that amount. Many other radio station creative services directors similarly provide excellent work for nominal creative fees. ☑

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QUICKREAD™

- Trying to entice a high-end client to your station? Consider the value-added bonus of outsourced creative.
- If you're looking online for outside creative, make sure you can click to hear a spot.
- Rates range from the ridiculous to the sublime. In-house creative service directors may offer freelance at reasonable prices.