



Radio: Sells shoes – not time

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Publish: 19 April 2010

I joined the weird and wonderful world of radio back in the time of vinyl records, quarter inch tape, WKRP in Cincinnati and Paddy O'Byrne. Stan Katz was running the highly successful 702 "The Rainbow of Sound" up against the might of the SABC...

Stan wanted to lessen his dependence on advertising agency whims and control the stations destiny. His plan was to create **a crack team of mercenaries** who would target businesses that did not have an advertising agency, and offer them a turnkey solution to advertising on radio.

Like the popular A-Team of TV fame at the time, we operated outside the law. A small, diverse team of radio rangers cohesive only because of the imminent threat of upsetting the station's agency team. If there was a business with a problem out there and no ad agency and no one else could help, our little band was there.

Our clients were businesses with too little money to attract the interest of an ad agency and they put all their cash and faith in us. In this environment we quickly learned what worked and what did not. To keep a customer, you had to sell his products and services. When it worked you got the next schedule and the next.

Early lessons

The first thing I learned was to care a lot about finding out what my clients' customers cared about. I discovered that people ignore advertising for the same reason they ignore anything else: lack of relevance. My clients wanted their ads to be about them, but I started to insist that they explain to me how their customer's life would be different after doing business with them. When we were able to make their radio commercials relevant and focus on what people already cared about they never failed.

At that time advertising think was: reach the right people in the right place. This presented a huge problem for us because our fortunes were tied to 702 and we had to make our clients message work on our station or walk away from the deal. That is when we learned that good ads work no matter where you put them. The secret was in crafting a message that would connect with our listeners. I asked my advertisers about the questions and concerns that their customers brought into the store and answered those questions in their commercials. We favoured Truth and Clarity over Creativity. No talking animals or inanimate objects, rip offs of TV commercials and unlikely conversations between dodgy characters. Instead we put real information in the copy. We asked sales people what their most effective closing lines were and put them in the copy. We asked what the three most desirable features of a product were and put them in the ad along with the benefits. We only worried about making ads that would speak to a felt need.

"I tried radio and it didn't work" is still a big objection today. The main reason is that most of the effort in radio sales today goes into selling time. Radio stations need to stress to their sales people that their ultimate job is to sell shoes for the shoe store, not to sell time on the radio station. With their focus on the advertisers needs, they will sell all the time they have and be forced to raise their rates.

For the advertiser it is fair to say that the secrets to getting great radio, boil down to **making sure that your radio reps are thinking about what you need, not what they need to sell you.** Involving the key people at the station to meet your unique brief with a unique idea and then delivering it on air, with real people who understand your objectives.

One last thing - if you are going to do radio - do it with people who love it and believe in it!

"has always been passionate about advertising on radio because it works!"

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