**Managing Your Other Sales Department**

There are two sales departments at every radio station. The problem is they each have different goals and different rewards. There is the real sales department with commission salespeople. And there is the "other" sales department – the one that is made up of the copywriter, production director, and announcers.

The real sales department goes out and sells advertising. The other sales department prepares the actual advertising. The real sales department prepares sales presentations that sell the advertisers. The other sales department prepares sales presentations to sell the listeners on the advertisers' products and services.

That is what is supposed to happen. And yet, too many of the commercials are written by people whose typing skills far exceed their writing abilities. They are passing off weak imitations of Dick and Bert commercials, poorly-plotted soap operas, rip-offs of national commercials, and other hackneyed devices as radio copy. Most copywriters learned their craft by listening to the radio and looking over what was written before they came. The result is an inbred approach to radio copy that few of us even bother to question anymore. *(The reference in the paragraph, of course, is to the late, great Dick Orkin and his former partner Bert Berdis. CL)*

**Is Creativity Dead?**

It is time to question it. As Jack Trout and Al Ries say in their book *Positioning, The Battle for Your Mind,* "creativity is dead." Truth is what sells today. But many copywriters have never been in the stores they are writing about. They have never used or seen the products in the ad. They have never met the decision-maker. And yet they set out to tell your listeners all about why they should go somewhere or buy a certain product.

Here is a question to ask yourself right now: if your copywriter is good enough to write for the clients who keep your station in business, why don't you ask him or her to handle the station's promotional campaign, too?

As long as copywriting is treated as an entry-level position, rewarded poorly, and not managed, the quality of the sales messages written by your other sales department will continue to drive advertisers back into print.

**Making the Grade**

In one of my copywriting seminars, I ask people to grade three pieces of copy they have written. The scoring system I use is quite simple. If the ad mentions a product or service that is for sale, the writer receives 25 points. If the ad contains a price for one or more of the advertised products and services, the writer gets another 25 points. If the ad asks for the order, the writer gets 20 points. (The phrase "stop in soon" gets no points.) If the ad has a sense of urgency, the writer gets 15 points. And if there is a theme or "hook" in the ad, the writer gets 15 more points.

My experience tells me that a piece of copy that scores below 70 points out of a possible 100 has less chance of producing measurable results for the advertiser. The score is an indication of how much selling information is in the ad. Half of the copy people bring to the seminar scores below 40 points! There have been more than a few zeroes.

You may think like the Michigan sales manager who told me that high frequency can make up for bad copy. That attitude is a disservice not only to the clients who pay for mediocre copy, but to the listeners who must work harder to get usable information for making a buying decision.

**Creating Effective Copy**

Bernice Fitz-Gibbon, author *of Macy’s, Gimbels and Me,* wrote ad copy for those two New York stores. In her book she tells how she got her ideas. When she had to write an ad for sofas, she would eavesdrop on a customer and the furniture salesperson. The customer's questions and the salesperson's answers became part of the copy. The information in her copy helped people decide to buy – and it sold millions of dollars’ worth of merchandise. *(Take a look at the subtitle of her book and you’ll notice she was making $90,000 per year in the 1960’s as a copywriter! CL)*

In the *Advertising Age* Professional Development Course, there is a line that says we write our best copy for people and products that we like. It is important that the people who write your copy get to know and like the people and products they are writing about. When that happens, they quit cranking out copy and start selling merchandise for your advertisers. When the other sales department starts concerning itself with selling, the sales department will quit running into the objection, "I tried radio once..." You will know you are doing a good job for your clients when the second and third schedules you sell them are easier to sell.

**A Copywriting Checklist**

Here are a dozen ideas you can implement immediately and inexpensively to improve the quality of your copy:

1. Change the title of your copywriter to "listener salesperson."
2. Listen—*really listen*—to the commercials that are being written and produced by your employees. Ask yourself, "What if I were paying the bill for these ads?"
3. Write down a list of good and bad things you hear in the copy and go over it with your "listener salesperson."
4. Grade 10 pieces of copy using the 100-point system described above. If the scores are consistently under 70, meet with your copywriter and salespeople to set a goal for improving the success elements.
5. Send for our free Layout Sheet for Radio. This sheet will help your sales-people get better data from the advertisers to give to the "listener salesperson."
6. When you notice improvement in the copy, reward the writer. When an ad sells well for the advertiser, I tell the listener salesperson. When an ad sells poorly, tell the copywriter.
7. When 10 pieces of copy score above 70 points, write the listener salesperson a sales commission check of $25 a week. *(Okay, I wrote that in 1983. Pick a higher number. CL)*
8. Require listener salespeople to attend all sales meetings. They need to know how to sell.
9. Train your listener salespeople in sales and copywriting skills. Send them to ad club meetings, seminars, and classes. Expose them to books, articles, and tapes about selling, advertising, and business. Ask them to read the trade mag zines of clients they write about.
10. Quit hiring copywriters on the basis of typing speed alone.
11. Require copywriters to go on one call with each salesperson every two weeks. While they are in the store, they should write a page of notes about the store and the merchandise in it. They can file these notes and use them when they are writing copy for the advertiser.
12. Meet with listener salespeople regularly. Ask them what they need from you and from the salespeople that will make their jobs more productive.

Manage the “other sales department.” You must set performance standards, conduct training meetings, review performance, and reward improvement. When you do these things, you are providing better service to your advertisers and listeners. And that is why you are in business.

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