

*Anatomy of Local  
Radio-TV Copy-*

*4th Edition*

*William A. Peck*

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# **ANATOMY OF LOCAL RADIO - TV COPY**

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**NEW FOURTH EDITION**

**By William A. Peck**



**TAB BOOKS**

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FOURTH EDITION

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Peck, at 38, is a 20-year veteran copywriter, starting with radio station KTSA in San Antonio, Texas.

For his own firm, Fleischer-Wilson-Peck Enterprises, Butler, Md., he has created some of the most widely used advertising campaigns for banks, savings and loans, and car dealers. These include the trademarked:

LITTLE DETROIT, IT'S ABOUT TIME A CAR DEALER DELIVERED MORE THAN JUST A CAR (THE FREE MECHANIC). LET THE COMPETITION BEWARE. BUY ME. FIRST NATIONAL BANK IS SECOND TO NONE. and THE GREAT GREEN MACHINE.\* He estimates that over 1000 clients in 50 states and Canada have used his radio commercials and that he has written over one million words of commercial copy.

He is a graduate of Johns Hopkins University, after 14 years of taking evening classes, and he is now studying at Hopkins for a master's degree in liberal arts. In his spare time he likes to bike, ski, hike, fish, read, and is working on a novel...when he isn't listening to the radio or watching television.

In addition to this book, Mr. Peck is author of *Radio Station Promotion Handbook*, published by TAB BOOKS.

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# 1

## Writing Commercials: Creativity & Influence

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No other form of writing gives a writer more opportunity for instant exposure and success than the local retail radio or TV commercial.

A commercial is a miniature play, story, or manifesto that can reach thousands overnight in a way that can influence behavior on an unparalleled scale.

With no more than 150 words, a commercial writer can get the kind of response that old-time pitchmen, crusading novelists, and muckraking journalists use thousands of words for.

There was a time when Madison Avenue was synonymous with the kind of creative excellence that won awards and created lines at the cash register. Today, Madison Avenue runs from sea to shining sea with hundreds of tributaries that crisscross the U.S. and Canada and reach into the smallest radio stations.

The first rule for writing “Mad-Ave” quality commercials is this: *Watch television and listen to radio every chance you get.* Look and listen—not for the programming, although that’s important; pay particular attention to the commercials. When everyone else is going to the kitchen or bathroom, take notice—and take notes. Once in a while—a *long* while—a commercial will be so interesting, so compelling, so entertaining, that people around you will forget to leave the room, forget to pick up the newspaper, forget to change stations, or forget to turn

the thing off altogether. *That's* the kind of commercial to take special note of. That's the only kind of commercial to learn how to write because that's the only kind that gets enough attention to get results.

When you're looking and listening, continually ask yourself: What...gets my attention? ...holds my interest? ...do I remember? ...do I want to act on?

You are exposed to hundreds of advertising impressions daily. A popular top-40 radio station can run 240 or more commercials plus self-promotional matter during the typical 12-hour day. Only one or two spots are going to stick with you by the end of that day. Which ones are they, and why?

You have to use yourself as the ultimate yardstick because you are the only person who can see into the workings of your own mind. A great novelist writes from his own experience—so does a great copywriter. You have to be more than just a writer, however. You have to be a psychologist, philosopher, sociologist, and—above all—a superconsumer. (By this I don't mean someone who buys a lot of things, but someone who looks for real value in the marketplace, knows it when he sees it, and can define it in terms understandable to other people.)

This is a book about *writing* commercials. Music and production values can be an important part of the total effect of the commercial, but they are no substitute for the original writing. Millions of dollars are thrown away every year on lavish productions that fail because the writer didn't lavish one good idea on his script. Volkswagen used relatively low budget black-and-white production to outscore in viewer retention the extravaganzas of Ford and Chevrolet. What made the difference? Certainly the Fords and Chevrolets were nicer to look at than the VWs. In the American-car ads, the girls were more numerous and prettier. What made the difference? Writing. Ideas.

The ideas happen in your head. The writing happens in your typewriter. You can be sitting anywhere while this process is going on—and the air is cleaner in Keokuck, Iowa than on Madison Ave., N.Y.

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## 2

# Where Do Ideas Come From ?

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We start out by saying that *a commercial, to be successful, has to be built on an Idea.*

But, as you and I know, there are ideas and IDEAS.

Advertising has a sole purpose, and it is not to pay your salary. If you want it to pay you regularly, and perhaps more than you ever dreamed possible, know this: *The purpose of advertising is to make the advertiser rich and famous.*

To achieve that purpose you must convince the listener/viewer that *he* will become “rich” or “famous” as a result of the advertiser’s product or service. *Rich* need not pertain to money, and *fame* can be important in one’s own family.

People, and that includes you and me, want to be richer and more famous, in one sense or another. So we all really want to believe that your client’s product or service will actually help us get what and where we want. We all really do want to believe that out there is someone or something that can bring us closer to our life’s goals. But we’re all gun-shy too. We’ve been ripped off and brushed off and rubbed the wrong way too many times. So...we want to believe, but we’re skeptical.

In order to convince me that your client’s product or service will help me in a way that I really want to believe, you must think of something original to attract my



attention. A new comparison, perhaps, between your product and something I am already familiar with.

Obviously, you can't just come out and say what you have in mind. Obviously. Back in the bad old days, when cigarettes were advertised on radio and TV, an unknown had the gall to simply state: We taste good, like a cigarette should. Remember the brand? Winston, of course. Even though the commercials have not been on the air for five years or more, who could forget? It's an idea that doesn't strain credibility, insult your intelligence, or call attention to other brands. It delivered a promise that the average smoker wanted to believe. Dozens of cigarettes that promised too much came and went, were unbelievable, and thus sank out of sight. Winston stuck to its one believable promise, and they became America's Number One Selling Brand—bad grammar notwithstanding!

So the first criterion for a commercial idea is that it be *believable*.

The second, that it be *simple*, easy to understand.

The third, that it be *memorable*.

Put them all together and they spell Central Selling Idea.

Rosser Reeves, in his excellent book *Reality in Advertising*, called it the ESP or Exclusive Selling Proposition. Call it what you want; every successful commercial has to have one. And once it has one, and it's a good one, it should be repeated over and over again. A good idea wears well.

But where do ideas come from?

They come from a thorough knowledge of the product, the market, the consumer, and your own attitudes toward these. They come when you know what your audience is looking for—when you present the product in terms of believable benefits. For example:

—When you buy one of my cars, you buy me.

—The Little Profit saves you more than anything you ever bargained for.

—It only takes a minute to get a better deal.

- First Federal Savings is the Great Green Machine.
- First National Bank is Second to None.
- Let the competition beware.
- It's about time a car dealer delivered more than just a car.

The first three ideas spell out the benefits. The next four hint at them, encouraging the listener/viewer to come to his own conclusions. Both tacks can be successful if they're good ones. The Winston line spelled out the benefit "tastes good." When the Budweiser jingle said, "Budweiser is the king of beers...but you know that," it alluded to promises that were better implied than stated. The marketing people at Bud obviously knew that meaningful product differentiation among beers is hard to make believable. (Their Beechwood aging story, in fact, is a good exception.) By using the line "but you know that," they planted in each consumer's head the idea that Bud is the leading beer, for whatever reasons are important to the individual consumer, and that if he doesn't "know that" there is something wrong with his taste buds. Obviously, *stating* the product benefit as part of your central idea rather than *hinting* at it is by far the safer course. Hinting is less direct and therefore a riskier way to make a point.

In any case, an idea grows out of discovering the best reason why a customer should buy your client's product or service.

A commercial starts with an idea. It will not accomplish its purpose—making you and the advertiser rich and famous—without one.

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### 3

## Over The Wall

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Most advertisers have a lot of things they want to tell their potential customers, and if you take their instructions at face value nobody is going to get rich and famous—not your client, not your listener, not you.

Local advertisers, in particular, are newspaper oriented, a habit built from years of relying on the local paper to bring in customers for weekend sales. It is true that people read the newspapers for news and information, and sales with lots of facts and figures are legitimate subjects to treat as news. The trouble is, when this type of material is transformed into radio and TV copy, it becomes a dull, boring wall of words. Adman/humorist Stan Freberg says that people have an invisible switch in their minds that they click off when such commercials come on the air.

I like to say that newspaper copy sells for today, but radio/TV copy sells for *every* day. In an ad budget, they both have a place, but we're concerned here with how to handle the copy for *every* day.

We said in the last chapter that every commercial has to start with an idea. A corollary to that is: *Every commercial should focus on one idea.*

One idea. That's a basic difference between your typical newspaper ad and a good radio or TV commercial. Newspaper ads can be crammed with copy and ideas. But radio commercials don't sit around in the living room all day, to be picked up and referred to again and perhaps

again. You have to make your central selling idea stick—the first time.

In order to be heard, understood, and remembered, use single-purpose, single-idea sentences. Build premise on premise, promise on promise, benefit on benefit, all adding up to the one Central Selling Idea.

Use short sentences. Direct, forceful verbs. Concrete nouns. Then, when you're through, read your commercial aloud. This will help you catch any tongue twisters or awkward consonant combinations. (More about the specifics of copy technique in a later chapter.)

So. You start with a *single* idea that promises a *benefit*. You phrase it so it is *memorable*, *to the point*, and *believable*. You make it *easy to understand* because people listen to commercials with only half an ear, when they listen at all. And you make it *interesting*, so they'll *be compelled* to listen.

Of course, the idea of the benefit itself should be interesting. If it is interesting enough, you don't need this book. On the other hand, when Volkswagen had the most economical, most practical, and least obnoxious car on the road, they also had the most interesting advertising campaign. Somebody asked an agency to give them a campaign like Volkswagen. The agency replied, "Give me a product like Volkswagen."

Interesting products make it a lot easier to write interesting ads. It takes imagination to write interesting ad copy on white goods or snow tires. I assume that you have an imaginative bent, or you wouldn't be in this business in the first place.

Just remember that no matter how much information an advertiser wants to cram into every commercial, all he is interested in is one thing: RESULTS.

Radio and TV commercials get results when they vibrate with a single interesting, believable idea that promises a benefit to the consumer.

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## 4

# The Making of Ideas

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Never ask yourself where your next idea is coming from. It's a bit like asking a centipede how he manages to synchronize his legs when he walks: dwelling on the question is apt to throw you.

A dictionary phrase defines idea as "a thought; mental conception or image." Everybody *has* these. The trick is to summon them at will and make productive use of them. They should grow organically out of the problem at hand—in this case the product or service to be advertised.

### SET A DEADLINE

Don't let the pressures of necessity paralyze you; let them work *for* you. When the deadline is hovering and the client is bellowing, the most extraordinary ideas may occur to you (just as the pangs of stagefright may help even experienced actors to give better performances). Why? Any crisis you face causes a flow of adrenalin. Result: You think faster, clearer, and better than normally. To capitalize on this, many copywriters put off writing anything until the last minute, counting on the tensions produced by that looming deadline to spur them to their creative high point. I can't say I recommend this form of mental roulette, but it *does* pay to set an artificial deadline—earlier than the real one, giving yourself the luxury of excess time. Condition yourself to observe this imaginary deadline. If you learn to

be your own worst critic, this method can build the same pressures as a genuine deadline and help you produce some of your best ideas. *Ideas simmered under pressure usually turn out well done.*

## THE TWO IDEA FAMILIES

For purposes of discussion, I've divided types of ideas into two categories: Copy ideas and merchandising ideas. A copy idea presents the product without altering it or the manner of selling it. A copy idea may simply be a clever bit of dialog calling attention to the product. For example:

(SOUNDS: COCKTAIL GLASSES, PIANO CHORDS, VOICES)

WOMAN: Hi Mister. How'd you like to buy me a little drinky-poo?

MAN: Anything you like, honey. I'm the happiest salesman in the world tonight.

WOMAN: Ah...your wife just ran off with your biggest competitor.

MAN: Hey...not half bad. My biggest competitor is Bethlehem Ford, see.

WOMAN: You sell cars?

MAN: Well, right now I'm just sitting here waiting while Bethlehem Ford sells itself right out of business.

WOMAN: Oh?

MAN: They'll take anything to make a deal. *Have to.* They've got cars coming out their ears. (CHUCKLING AS HE TALKS) They got some idea they're *Little Detroit*.

WOMAN: Little Detroit?

MAN: Yeah...ain't that a scream?

WOMAN: And you're just sitting here buying little old me a drinky-poo while Little Detroit sells itself right out of business. Pretty cute.

MAN: Yeah...(LAUGHING STOPS...HIS MAN-NER SOBERS UP) It...ah...only has one drawback.

WOMAN: What's that?

MAN: Could you...lend me enough money to pay the check?

The humor is used to get attention *and* to make a sales point.

To *merchandise* a product or to get merchandising ideas in general, you have to dig deeper, often changing something or adding something new to the client's policies. Guarantees, giveaways, and complimentary services all come under the heading of merchandising:

1ST MAN: Oh boy, do I have a headache.

2ND MAN: How long have you had it?

1ST MAN: About a year.

2ND MAN: A year? Have you been to a doctor?

1ST MAN: No...but I've been to an awful lot of mechanics.

2ND MAN: Mechanics?

1ST MAN: They can't seem to do a thing for me.

2ND MAN: Mechanics? For your headache?

1ST MAN: Oh! (SUDDENLY REALIZING THE HUMOR OF THE SITUATION, STARTS LAUGHING)

2ND MAN: Yes... I...figured...

1ST MAN: I'm talking about my car.

2ND MAN: Your new car?

1ST MAN: Hasn't run like new since the day I got it.

2ND MAN: Oh, headaches, huh.

1ST MAN: I should have suspected something though...

2ND MAN: Why was that?

1ST MAN: I found a free aspirin dispenser beside the cigarette lighter.

2ND MAN: Too bad you didn't buy from Al Smith Buick.

1ST MAN: They got somethin' stronger than aspirin?

2ND MAN: Yep. A free mechanic.

1ST MAN: Free what?

2ND MAN: Free mechanic. Comes with every Al Smith Buick. For one full year. So if *anybody* gets a headache...

1ST MAN: Yeah?

2ND MAN: It'll be him.

The merchandising idea must offer the average ad-hardened listener a strong benefit. Every commercial must sell, not the "new, exclusive features" but the way in

which these features will *benefit* the listener. The more concrete and direct the benefit, the easier it is to get action. The benefits you build for your clients should be so believable, so provocative, so exciting that you are torn between finishing the commercial and running out to buy the product yourself!

Note that you must *build* benefits—usually out of the raw factual material you collect from the client. Here is a good time to point out that you must get to know the client's business or product in depth. You should know at least ten times as much about the client as you'll need to know for his commercials—*fifty* times as much if you have the opportunity. If you are chained to the typewriter and are impoverished by the material the salesman brings you, see if you can get permission to call the client for a chat. It's almost certain to be worth the effort.

In my experience, one dairy had a process which extracted odors from milk—something the dairy hadn't talked much about. A copywriter for our agency learned about the process, and found out also that no other dairy in town had it. Rather than dwelling on the negative or technical-sounding features of the method, the copywriter centered a campaign on how the device made it possible for the dairy to deliver truly fresher tasting milk to each family's door.

While nearly every dairy tries to use the theme of freshness, this was the first one in its area that actually had a believable reason why its milk was fresher. Because a copywriter went for facts, his commercials outperformed all competition, as the dairy's sales curves demonstrated.

Another merchandising idea which provided a good customer benefit was a *Magic Menu* created for a grocery chain in a medium-sized town. Tired of listing a catalog of specials day after day in the chain's advertising copy (specials that few really heard and fewer remembered), a writer wondered "What if we were to combine these specials into meals and break down the overall cost per meal?" The grocery chain hired a home economist to try out the idea. They discovered that balanced and attractive



meals could be planned from their specials for about 25¢ a serving. “Prepare balanced meals for 25¢ a serving” promises a benefit that the lists of specials had only weakly implied.

While it is true that long lists of special prices are effective in newspapers, they simply can’t be absorbed by radio listeners. Notice how the *Magic Menu* idea is the *single* idea around which the following commercial is built. This is a straight no-gimmick spot—but it was one of a series that helped build a strong image for a previously struggling chain:

Now, for just twenty-five cents a serving, you can prepare exciting meals planned by a home economist for *your* family. Just follow the *Magic Menu* when you shop for specials this weekend at your Piggly Wiggly store. At Piggly Wiggly, you do more than just save on a few unrelated items. At Piggly Wiggly, specials are planned so they can be prepared into complete meals for as little as twenty-five cents a serving. Spice up every meal with vitality. Shop the *Magic Menu* way at your Piggly Wiggly Store. Ask for your free *Magic Menu* today—at Piggly Wiggly.

The *Magic Menu* was a fairly complex merchandising idea, involving additional planning and expenditure for the client. There are, however, uncountable ways to merchandise when you know your client doesn’t want a heavy cash outlay for the idea. Don’t let cost considerations inhibit your thinking. Sometimes an idea that’s too expensive can be modified—and sometimes an idea only *seems* as if it’s going to cost the client money.

As an example: a cafeteria was persuaded to offer “All you can eat for \$1.98” on its off nights. This idea managed to draw new customers—who then became repeat customers—and the cafeteria made money on the dollar-ninety-eight nights.

Whenever you as a writer get the chance to help *plan* a client’s advertising (this situation should be mandatory but

unfortunately is but rarely), suggest more than just copy ideas. Suggest new ways to *merchandise* and you'll make more money for the client.

## A WAY OF PRODUCING IDEAS

Did you notice the *Magic Menu* idea resulted when a writer wondered, "What if...the specials could be planned into meal menus?" The cafeteria made money because a writer wondered, "What if...we were to serve a customer an entire meal—all he wanted—for less than two dollars?"

Good copy and merchandising ideas often start with the words "What if?" For an exercise, start a sentence with those two words and finish it with whatever occurs to you—and don't worry if the exercise doesn't turn into a workable commercial the first few times you try it. Eventually it will.

One night I was at a concert absently thumbing through the program as the orchestra tuned up, and suddenly a thought came to me: "What if you could give a car a tuneup over the radio?" Later that night, I wrote this spot:

As a service to you, car owners of Norfolk, Jones Brothers Oldsmobile will now attempt to give you a free tuneup, right over the air. Are you ready? Are your *cars* ready? *Okay*. At the end of the countdown, Jones Brothers Oldsmobile will attempt, through the miracle of modern electronics, to give you a free tuneup. 10...9...8...7...6...5...4...3...2...1...*Free..Tuneup!*

(LOUD SOUND EFFECT: ORCHESTRA TUNING UP)

There...does your car run noticeably better now? If not, maybe it's time to see about a new Jones Brothers Oldsmobile. It's yours...to the tune of just \$3942.

The tuneup commercial is typical of the way to beef up copy that contains no strong merchandising idea. There is a hairline of distinction between being clever and being cute,

and you'll have to let your own judgment, or that of those around you, be your guide as to which is which. A clever copy idea keeps a commercial from being dull, gets it heard and remembered.

When you have a strong merchandising idea, something new and newsworthy such as the *Magic Menu*, that in itself can carry the copy. Clever ideas may even get in the way. In this case, the copy should simply be sharp and to the point.

When you have a merchandising idea of only medium impact, you may want to link it with a clever copy idea to double the interest. For example:

(SOUND OF BULLDOZERS)

We wanted to call it *Smith Ford's Bulldozer Sale*...only we were afraid some people might get the idea we were selling bulldozers. Actually, as you can hear in the background, the bulldozers are leveling Smith Ford's outdoor display area here at 100 Union Avenue. We must move our new and used cars out of the bulldozers' way and we've got no place to put them! That's why we're giving you sacrifice prices to drive them away. Choose from Memphis' widest selection of factory-fresh Smith Fords and the best-serviced, cleanest used cars. Clean—if you don't mind a little *dust* right now. You can save a wheelbarrowful of dollars. Help Smith clear the lot to make room for the bulldozers and we'll level off prices for *you*. During this sale, new Smith Fords and used cars are just plain dirt cheap. On the level.

There's one danger of playing the "What if?" game. If you do it thoroughly, you are going to write down a lot of ideas which have been used before. This is inevitable. Ideas you've heard before are bound to pop into your mind. Fine. Only don't use them. They may suggest a fresh twist or application, but stay away from the ruts of well-worn ideas and techniques. This is not to say you should be different for

the sake of being different, but don't imitate or you will wind up being dull.

You'll know you're doing well when your original approach is imitated by others. This will force you to cast around for another new idea...something else that is unique. And this is the way careers grow.

### **DON'T BE CRITICAL**

For the "What if?" method to produce worthwhile results, allow your mind free rein, and don't—repeat, *don't*—be critical of each new idea as it comes to you. Think of your mind as being divided into two channels, each competing with the other for dominance as you sit at your desk. These would be your *critical* and *creative* channels. Start by creating as many ideas as you can, with your *critical* switch turned off! There's a time to be critical, and it's *later*! Meanwhile, stretch your creative muscles, concocting as many ideas as you can from the facts you've gathered. You'll be surprised at how many ideas will occur if you don't inhibit yourself and aren't afraid to think of things that are "too far out," "too silly," "too sophisticated," "too lowbrow," etc. Don't lose any of them. Write all your ideas, at least in brief note form.

What are the results of all this? Again, let's look at a few examples:

A finance company threw off the doldrums by getting a telephone number made of the exchange prefix "Capital" followed by D-O-U-G-H. This was easy to remember. And the slogan used, "*Dial for dough*," was virtually impossible to forget. The company's business tripled on the first day and stayed at the new level. This success story couldn't be told had the copywriter "logically" discarded the idea as "too impractical."

A department store invited customers to "Mark Your Own Specials!" Every customer was handed a red tag at the door and could affix it to any item not already on sale. This created an automatic markdown and a definite saving—but the big factor was the appeal of directly influencing the purchase price. The open-marketplace

bargaining and haggling of yesterday held a definite intrigue, and customers still like to create their own benefits—thus the inflated window sticker price on automobiles these days.

### ACCENTUATE THE NEGATIVE

As mentioned, don't apply judgment to your ideas as you're producing them in your own mind. Only after you have a number of idea possibilities jotted down should you analyze them for freshness, believability, practicality, etc. Even if your critical sense then rejects some of your ideas, examine the *reasons* for rejection. These very reasons may become the foundation for a good, workable idea. This is called "making the negative a positive" and it can be a very interesting and valuable approach.

Volkswagen capitalized on the bug-like car shape, and Avis Rent-A-Car used its Number 2 position as a believable motive for "trying harder." Similar reasoning must have prompted a Baltimore menswear retailer to forgo the usual sale captions like "end-of-season bargains!" "unbelievable savings!" "storewide clearance!" etc. The merchant put a big sign in the front windows with one word: *Leftovers*.

Let's take an example you might be faced with. Suppose you're trying to write a commercial for an Oldsmobile dealer who ranks seventh in sales in his market. He is off the beaten path. He has a dirt-floor service department. Most people never think of him when they think of buying an Oldsmobile, and no amount of fancy coverup talk is going to change the facts of the situation or people's impression of this dealer. But a line which *did* change a lot of people's minds—in just such a situation—was

You probably don't think of Motor City first when you think of buying an Oldsmobile...

This candid, statement-of-negative-fact intro was followed by:

...That's why we *have* to sell for less. The truth is, we can *afford* to sell you an Olds for less. Oldsmobiles cost all dealers the same amount of money to begin with. But we're off the beaten

path—with a small building, small staff, small overhead. That's why we can afford to make a smaller profit on every Olds we sell. We may not be the first dealer you thought of. But, when you price our Olds, we'll be the *last* you'll see!

Candor helps make any commercial more successful. When you admit your weaknesses, people are more willing to believe your strengths.

Let's take another example. A shoe store wanted to advertise a beginning-of-the-week sale on Mondays. Reason: Mondays were usually poor business days. The store manager, though, was taken aback when the writer wanted him to admit this lack of Monday traffic in the copy. The commercial was written announcing a Monday sale with no real reason behind it and in the face of consumer preference for shopping on weekends. The commercials didn't pull very well because the client ignored his negative instead of turning it into a positive by advertising it.

### EXERCISES

1. Write ten outlandish "What if?" ideas concerning items you see around your home or office.
2. Develop three of these ten ideas into partial commercials for any kind of business. (Write the opening and a skeleton outline.)
3. Choose several representative businesses around your town. For each one, write ten merchandising ideas which really interest *you* as a consumer. Now, check around. Are these businesses presently using any of the ideas you thought of? Should they be?
4. Think of five reasons for any kind of business to have a sale. Write them down and save them for a rainy day.

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## 5

# Lifeless Language: The Cliche

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The desk dictionary you have nearby will call a cliché a “trite expression or idea.” Going further, *trite* is defined as “worn out by constant use.”

Cliches are a substitute for thinking. If you use a lot of them in talking with people, you’re a predictable conversationalist. If you use a lot of them in your copy, you’re an expendable writer. Anyone, after all, can come up with a hackneyed expression or idea.

The most common clichés are worn out metaphors or similes. These clichés often originated as poetic language by such imaginative writers as Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Chaucer. Take the phrase “dead as a doornail” as an illustration. The first person who used this phrase was being original. The second person who used it was perhaps a shrewd copyist. Anyone using the phrase today, however, is not only a hack but is being meaningless and archaic as well. Who knows what a doornail is today?

To eliminate such clichés, reread. Question every sentence, every phrase. Is it original? If not, where did it originate? Is it believable or just puffery? Does it serve any purpose? Is it the kind of description needed to get across your idea? Or would it be better to be straight and uncluttered? Above all, if the phrase is common and overused, try to avoid it. Something much better will spring into your mind if you think well enough (and long enough)!

## COMMON COMMERCIAL CLICHES: THE DROP-EVERYTHING SCHOOL

We've been talking about metaphorical cliches. There is another kind of cliché—simply tired everyday words and phrases. These are cliches for the same reason, however: They've lost their impact through overuse.

Don't let the fact that so many businesses use these cliches as a matter of course lull you into thinking that it's all right to use them. The kind of phrases I'm talking about are these, used as intensifiers:

- that's right
- you heard right
- once again
- never before and never again
- proof positive
- remember
- yes, just
- that's... (This is often used at the end of a sentence to repeat the price or at the end of a commercial to emphasize the sponsor's name. "Shop at Jordan's today.. That's Jordan's Department Store." Why say "that's"?)

Some trite phrases that are supposed to denote low prices are:

- |                         |                              |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| —cut rate               | —bargain                     |
| —cut prices to the bone | —bargains galore             |
| —prices slashed         | —door-busting bargains, etc. |

The list could fill this book. Taking such words from our copywriting vocabulary may seem difficult, but half the fun of copywriting is thinking up new ways to really get your message across. Certainly, words like those above don't do it. Anyway, your competition is using them, and you're different.

Such words are in what I call the *drop-everything* school. How many times have you heard, "Drop *everything* and hurry down to Finklemeier's Hardware Store!'"?

"Well, personally," every listener thinks to himself, "I don't care if Finklemeier is selling lawnmowers for \$5, I



am going to finish my coffee before I amble down to take a look.”

But let's suppose your client, Finklemeier, is really selling lawnmowers for \$5. Isn't this *fact* more powerful than all the *hurry-up-and-buy-nows*? Throw out the unnecessary clutter and come right out with it:

Five dollars buys a guaranteed lawnmower at Finklemeier's. Fifty lawnmowers are in stock and five dollars buys one of them for *you* during this week's sale only. Cut your grass with it. See how easily the balloon tires whisk you over your entire lawn, how ball-bearing action cuts your cutting time.

What does Finklemeier mean by “guaranteed”? If you're not satisfied, take it back. Finklemeier refunds your purchase price.

But five dollars tells you the story. Finklemeier's Hardware—Main and Augusta.

Try to cut a word out of the above without distorting the low-key, matter-of-fact approach. Maybe you can. Write other similar commercials, being careful *not* to include cliches or meaningless expressions. Try to establish a conversational yet compelling manner. Once this happens, people will listen and buy—although they will not necessarily drop everything to do it.

Incidentally, the item and the price must be good. If they cannot get you, as the writer, enthusiastic enough about them to present hard selling facts, better suggest another item to be advertised. Even if the advertising is intriguing enough to sell a poor item, the merchant may lose a customer.

Use this rationale: If the merchandise is as good as the retailer says it is, why would he have to scream about it, exaggerate facts, tell people to “drop everything”? Potential customers unconsciously realize this. For example, you are familiar with the commercial that starts:

Everybody is hurrying to the Smith-Jones Gigantic Shoe Sale...

If “everybody” is in such a hurry, why advertise? Anyway, I am part of that “everybody” and I’m not hurrying. Not without more motivation than that, anyway.

### **QUALITY AND LOW PRICE—WITHOUT CLICHES**

It is possible to stress quality and low price in the same commercial. But you have to do away with the kind of cliches you see here:

Cotton dresses now just \$1.49...You heard right (or, “that’s right,” “yes,” “yes, just”). \$1.49 for \$5.00 dresses during the cotton dress event at Sellmore’s Department Store. Hurry on down and buy now while they last. That’s Sellmore’s Department Store, 101 North Main.

Instead, select words carefully to build a concrete impression:

Step through Sellmore’s rainbow into the prettiest dress you’ve seen this summer. The only thing that’s inexpensive...is the price. (PAUSE) Seven dollars...forty-nine cents. Write it down so you’ll have it on your downtown shopping list. One rack of these cotton dresses, worth fifteen dollars and more, has a price tag that says \$7.49. Of course, no one sees the price tag but you. Sellmore’s. North and Main.

The differences are somewhat exaggerated here, but you get the idea. The second commercial stresses the attractiveness of the dresses and, before giving the low price, hastens to assure the listener that these are not “cheap” dresses. It implies that they compare with far more expensive items. The price is then emphasized by asking the listener to write it down. Whether she does or not, chances are the oddity of the request will firmly implant a mental note. Once again the expensiveness of the dresses is implied, as is the gentle threat of a sellout, couched in the words “one rack.” “Some,” “one group of,” or the exact number are other ways to avoid the trite “limited number.”

At the close, vanity is again appealed to: "Of course, no one sees the price tag but you."

When you work to eliminate clichés such as those in the first of these two commercials, you'll find yourself writing in the more interesting style of the second one.

### A LACK OF FRESHNESS: STALE SUPERLATIVES

Closely related to clichés are superlatives. What do these *mean*, anyway? How much better is something that's "great" than something that's "good"? How much better is something that's "magnificent," "wonderful," etc.? Adding to the difficulty of getting at the meaning of these words is the tendency to stick *very* before all of them. On principle, avoid these "great" superlatives.

If you want to use superlatives in your copy, try words that are fresher or more descriptive—words like:

accomplished	complete	inimitable
animated	conversational	invaluable
active	delightful	lively
alive	electrifying	prize
bright	enjoyable	stirring
bubbly	expressive	striking
buoyant	fluid	timely
captivating	fluent	uncommon
clear	forceful	unusual
colorful	handsome	vivid

I won't go on. A dictionary or thesaurus will give you dozens of words to use instead of *great*, *wonderful*, *very great*, or *very wonderful*.

If you don't find a word that does exactly what you want, you might try coining one. Some of the more colorful words in our language have been deliberate creations for a specific effect. On radio, a wine becomes the "genu-wine," and Schweppes mixers have a carbonation that can only be described as "Schwepper-vescence." And there are always fad words which—before they become overworked—can be used as superlatives. *Mod* and *psychedelic* were two good examples until they became overused.

What gives this word its impact? Human nature. Your nature. People like new things. Possession of something

new makes people feel superior to the way they felt before they had this “new” item. Any untried product holds a promise of relieving a slight discontent that people carry around with them. The word is so important that manufacturers spend millions each year changing their packages to include the words *New! Improved!* and millions more to announce the fact in all advertising media.

Even though it is a cliché, the word *new* can step up the power of your commercials. But when presenting a new store or product, give a real reason for its newness. Demonstrate it with some new benefit. Try to make the new store or product sound more revolutionary than anything else in its field (since you’re going to be competing with a lot of other new things).

Using the word *new* or the idea of newness helps you get and keep attention in a commercial by telling people something they didn’t know before. Consider this commercial:

(SALVATION-ARMY-BAND MUSIC; COMMOTION)

MAN: Madam! What are you doing with my packages of Bug Out?

WOMAN: This is national Be Kind to Bugs week and I’m here to stamp out this new product that’s guaranteed to stamp out bugs.

MAN: Be Kind to Bugs week? Why haven’t I heard of it before?

WOMAN: Before the invention of Bug Out, bugs didn’t have much to worry about. A few weak sprays, a couple of messy powders...

MAN: I catch on. You mean that Bug Out really bugs the bugs like they’ve never been bugged before.

WOMAN: That’s why Be Kind to Bugs week was started—to stamp out the product that stamps out bugs! (MORE COMMOTION—AS IF SHE AGAIN ATTACKS DISPLAY OF PACKAGES)

MAN: But, Madam, Bug Out is *kind* to bugs. It has the approval of the USDA, U. S. Public Health Service, the State of Illinois...

WOMAN: But how can it possibly be *kind* to bugs?

MAN: Puts them out of their misery...*fast*.

Another word that ranks high in consumer appeal is *free*. Use this when you can. Certainly, any business offers—or can offer—certain free products or services. Here's one way of combining the ideas “new” and “free” in one commercial:

If you've gone to McDougal's lately to get your car serviced, you either loved it or you couldn't get in! That's why McDougal's has opened their newest, largest and most modern service center at 100 North Main.

Every day, three hundred cars are getting fast, accurate service in McDougal's new facilities. Drive in during the Grand Opening—and get an electronic tuneup *free*!

Other Grand Opening prices slightly higher.

Another word that is important is the word *now*. It carries all the connotations of the drop-everything school in an unpretentious, nonirritating way. When you want immediacy and cannot think of anything better or original, use *now*.

Have you noticed that when you work to eliminate cliches, better writing comes almost automatically? Almost.

### EXERCISES

1. Write five common cliches such as “As luck would have it,” “sadder but wiser,” “last but not least,” etc.
2. Write a short commercial employing five common commercial cliches. (This should take about ten seconds.) Then, rewrite it tersely, using raw facts and clean, specific phrases.
3. What are five better ways of saying “good” (other than those listed in this chapter)? Work them into five commercial leads.

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## The Right Words

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Experiment. Choose one word to take the place of a phrase. Expand a concrete word into a descriptive sentence. Read everything aloud, critically, as though you are standing back ten feet from a canvas you've just painted. Is the picture clear? Is it effective? That is, have you used the *right words*?

### USE VIVID WORDS

Take some common advertising adjectives. Then replace them with words that have a slightly different meaning and can make the product you're describing sound new, different, and *really* appealing.

Because every summertime ice cream commercial raves about "delicious" flavor, why not say "golden with flavor," "alive with flavor," or anything else original?

When describing a perfume's "beautiful" fragrance, substitute "singing." Doesn't "singing fragrance" provoke rather good thoughts and feelings about the product?

Every new model home is "the way to modern living." Yours might be "an adventure in space."

If you're not accustomed to this kind of word-painting, expose yourself to some of it in print. In the fiction department: Anthony Burgess, John Updike, Ray Bradbury. If you're inclined to go further: Carl Sandburg, W. B. Yeats, Gerard Hopkins, Robinson Jeffers.

Don't overdo the poetry. You're still writing commercials that are supposed to sell something to somebody. Here's one successful example of using a touch of poetic language to sell savings and loan:

Green. It's the color of life. The color that makes plants grow. That gives us the air we breathe. It's no accident that green is also the color of money. It pays you to preserve as much as possible where it is going to grow fastest, with the highest degree of safety. At the Great Green Machine we work together like a well-oiled machine to help you build a better life. That's why they call us the Great Green Machine. First Federal Savings and Loan.

### USE URGENT WORDS

Vivid words can do a great deal for you by attracting attention to your commercials. It should be almost as obvious that you need *urgent* words for prompting action on the part of your listeners.

Some people in advertising still think that to be urgent you have to scream. However, screaming commercials filled with exaggerated claims have become so common that they don't usually get attention. While most commercials are screaming, the commercial that walks softly but carries a big stick has a greater chance of being heard. A sense of urgency can be achieved without screaming. How? One simple technique that's always useful is to use simple, direct verbs.

Read the following radio spot and you should see that it can be made more urgent by using simple verbs:

You can save as you've never saved before. Everyone is shopping at the once-a-year clearance sale of men's wear at J's Department Stores. During this sale, you can buy men's sport coats for twenty dollars each and men's sport shirts for as low as three dollars each. You'll be saving money and getting the highest quality clothing in town. You can save on men's shoes, too, as well as on ties, pajamas, bathrobes..everything for men, during the once-a-year clearance sale on menswear at J's

Department Store. That's J's—where savings for men are man-sized.

Here's a second version of the same commercial:

Save as you've never saved before. Shop the once-a-year clearance sale of men's wear at J's Department Store. Buy men's sport shirts for three dollars. Sport coats? Top name—just twenty dollars. You save money—get the highest quality clothing. Save on shoes, ties, pajamas, bathrobes. Save on everything for men...get man-sized savings at J's. Shop the once-a-year clearance sale of menswear at J's Department Store. These prices happen just once a year and that once a year is *now*.

Obviously, all those clichés, too, have to go. But the second commercial dwarfs the first because it has tempo. It's direct. Let's examine why.

Don't say, as the first version does, "You *can* save." Be exclamatory: "Save!" It's your benefit line. Ask directly for the sale. "Buy men's sport shirts" (rather than saying "You can buy..."). Exploit the sense of immediacy that use of the present tense can give. Make it seem that the customer *is* saving money and it's happening right now.

Incidentally, "during the" is always a warning sign that should stop you. You're getting too lengthy. Don't be afraid to cut a sentence into its smallest parts even if it results in a sentence fragment. If it helps you create a sense of urgency, it's a good sentence!

For example, which of the following commercials, read aloud, is more natural and convincing?

Breck's closes out the season by offering air-conditioners for half price, including installation.

Or

Buy your air-conditioner for half price. Half price *including* installation. Now, at Breck's Air-Conditioning.

The second carries tempo and it is forceful and direct.



When you're forced to deal with something indefinite—for example, a sweepstakes or contest—think in terms of *when*, not *if*. Say “you save” not “you can save.” Instead of saying “if you win,” say “when you win.” Not “You can go to South America,” but “You go to South America.” See the difference?

### USE PRECISE WORDS

Be exact, always. You'll find exact words carry a little salesmanship in themselves. Avoid *try*. You can strike this word from almost any commercial you write. Why use such a weak word when it is more vivid and positive to come out with what you mean and ask people to buy, drink, eat, drive, sleep on, walk on, sip, savor, feel, etc.? Avoid also *that* and *which*. These usually tell you that your sentence needs de-wording. Which sentences below do you prefer?

There are many interesting things that can be seen in New Orleans.

Or

Here are some things that people have said about our new car.

Or

Here is what people say about our new car.

You'll notice that keeping the verbs in the present tense helps too.

Also avoid redundant expressions like:

—return back

—refer back

—repeat again

—good benefits

—still persists

—very unique

—write down

—and also

Chances are these and similar phrases would slip by most listeners, but in a minute spot you simply don't have time to waste with these redundancies—and they rarely help.

### MEANING AND SOUND

When writing commercials, you're trying to make people behave in a certain way: use a certain product, see a certain show, or whatever. Your only tool for doing this job

is language. You try to put together *sentences* and *phrases* that will make people behave the way you want them to.

But—forgetting about sentences and phrases for a minute—how can just plain *words* help you get the action you want? It's hard to fully explain, but it is a fact that people respond in different ways to different sounds.

In the English language, the *i* sound of *little* is often in words that *mean* something little. *Bit, slip, slim, lip, lint, kid, mitten, list, hiss, pigmy* are only a few. *Chit-chat* means *small talk*.

There's no real reason for this. It just happens because of the way we're conditioned by the way we've grown up with the language. Somehow, the *i* sound of *little* is different than the brighter *i* sound of *like, alive, lithe, height, ride, light*. *The sound itself gives a certain impression.*

So it's handy to keep in mind that word *sounds* are sometimes as important as word *meanings*.

A kind of flashy, free-moving impression can be set up by using the *fl* sound as in *flag, flash, flurry, flounce, flippery, fling...* and Walt Disney's *flubber*.

A crisp, decisive mood can be set by words that have a crisp, decisive ending: *yep, clip, pep, blot, jet, make, ship, shift, keep, poke, top, shop, ACT!*

I'm sure you get the idea. Spend some time thinking about words and what they sound like—and how you can *use* what they sound like to make your commercials work better.

Again, read every one of your commercials aloud. You'll get impressions that you wouldn't otherwise and catch hard-to-read sounds that might have slowed the pace of the commercial. For example, even the innocent-looking *costs* can slush up a sentence, because of the hissy final *s*. So, try making the subject plural in this case, and changing *costs* to *cost*.

### EXERCISES

1. Describe the following things in one paragraph. Vividly.
  - one-day cleaning at Lord Baltimore Cleaners
  - diamonds at Lahnz Jewelers

- your favorite sports car
  - a ballpoint pen
  - skis available at Britter Sports Hut
  - bicycles from The Cycle Shop
2. Rewrite the paragraphs you've just written. This time, add a sense of urgency. Keep in mind action words and crisp, clipped endings.

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## Write The Way You Talk: Be Natural

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Are your commercials getting the easy, natural sound of everyday speech? Most good commercials have it.

A commercial that “sounds” like a commercial screams, “I’m trying to sell you something. Listen to me.” Such a commercial is at an immediate disadvantage. No one really wants to be separated from his money—but everyone will willingly, yes, *happily*, spend money if it seems to be mostly his own idea.

### A NATURAL TONE

To establish this rapport with your listeners, ask every line of your commercial if it is written the way you talk. If it is replete with “advertise-ese,” that high-powered language heard so often in commercials but almost never in real life, re-form it. If you use one announcer, pretend he is sitting in a living room with two friends or talking to a coworker on a commuter train. If you have two people talking, give them *conversation*, not dialog. Don’t make them sound as if they were delivering a commercial.

Is the difference in tone between these two commercials evident?

Clothiers are on the way...to set a sales record for the month of May! Yes, the month of May is the biggest sales month yet in Smith Clothiers’ history...and to top off the month we’re giving you top style and top dollar values. Top off your summer

wardrobe with the highest hoppin' savings for you, and you, and *you*. We're splittin' at the seams to suit you up high, wide, and handsome. So hurry during the month of May to Smith for the kind of savings only Smith can give you. That's Smith Clothiers...1198½ Brandywine.

Pretty bad, isn't it? Let's see how we can make it sound more conversational and less like a commercial. Here's one way of approaching it...with two voices, in a "situation" spot. ("Situation" commercials are those involving lifelike conversation between two or more persons. All other commercials will be referred to as "straight.")

1ST ANNCR: Wow! In all this heat! What are you lugging around in that big box?

2ND: Bought an overcoat.

1ST: Overcoat! On a day like this?

2ND: Sure did. For a very good reason. It's half-price down at Smith's.

1ST: Smith Clothiers! Half-price?

2ND: Here...I'll show you. (SOUND OF TISSUE)

1ST: (WHISTLES) Say, that's nice. Does Smith have anything else on sale?

2ND: Yes, some things in every department. I got these slacks at a discount, too.

1ST: Hmmmm. I think I'll stop at Smith's downtown store on my way home tonight.

2ND: I would if I were you. At these prices they may be sold out tomorrow.

No one likes to listen to a pompous, stuffed-shirt personality. The same is true for pompous, overstuffed commercials.

A really good commercial should have only one dominant selling idea (remember "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should"?), with other points or ideas only supporting the main one. As you write every commercial, ask yourself, "What idea am I trying to put across?" Then put it across.

Make *every word* in the commercial do its job in helping your central idea along. Otherwise, out!

The easiest way to follow this rule is to *stick to the facts*. Avoid cliches, avoid wild claims, avoid unnatural figures of

speech, avoid uninteresting words and generalities. You will have a basically good commercial.

### USE THE WORD "YOU"—TALK TO ONE PERSON

Forget there are hundreds of people listening to you. Single out one person and talk to him. Never say:

Everybody is hurrying to Beck's for lawnmower sharpening.

It's not a very believable claim and it screams "*Commercial!*" all over the room. You wouldn't say this if you were talking to him in his backyard. You'd probably say,

Sam, your lawnmower needs sharpening. I know a hardware store that will do it this afternoon for half-price.

Talk to one person in this manner and you're more likely to sell *many* persons. Here's an example of the technique, extended into a commercial:

One big weakness of radio commercials...it's impossible to know how many of you are actually *interested* in what I'm saying. Let's say there are five thousand of you tuned in right now. And, let's say this is a commercial selling, uh, color TV sets from Hi-Fi House for five dollars a week. Right away that eliminates about half of you. Either you're too young or you just bought a new TV or you're not interested in color, anyway. Okay. And we can eliminate those of you who, for reasons of your own, just aren't interested in TV, color or otherwise. Of course, most of you who are left probably aren't paying any attention to me, anyway—you *never* listen to commercials. Let's say that leaves...umm...why, it leaves *you*.

Well, when you show up in the neighborhood tonight with your new Hi-Fi Color TV, expect people to ask, "How on earth did you manage to buy it?" You can smile mysteriously and say, "I keep my ears open for a good deal."

You just did.

Use the word *you*. Use it positively. Use it often. *You*, next to your listener's own name, is the most pleasing sound in the world to him.

## EXERCISES

1. Take the stuffiness out of the one-announcer commercial for Smith Clothiers. Use the word *you*.
2. Rewrite the commercial for Hi-Fi Color TV, speaking naturally and using a positive rather than a negative approach.

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## Repetition Builds Reputation

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Many successful advertisers use repetition effectively to build sales leadership. Not only do they “saturate” a market with their commercials, they repeat their theme and name again and again within each commercial.

Pall Mall cigarettes leaped into sales leadership in the sixties using the parrot-like repetition of a theme:

Smoke Pall Mall...so good, good, good; Good looking, good tasting, good smoking Pall Mall.

This seems to indicate that repetition can work well hand-in-hand with simplicity. It works nationally and it works locally.

The reasons for using repetition are many. The first time someone “hears” something, he probably *doesn't* hear it. The second time, he may pick up one ear. The third time, he may pick up both ears. The fourth time, a message may register. It may take dozens after dozens of impressions to cause a person to *act* on a commercial he hears.

Therefore, in some selling situations, the more you repeat your central selling idea within each commercial, the fewer commercials you need to make a sale.

### **FAMILIARITY BREEDS CUSTOMERS**

Such repetition creates a gentle, gradual brainwashing. It makes the consumer feel familiar with an otherwise



unfamiliar product or store. And people tend to *buy* what they are familiar with.

It's your job as a copywriter to create familiarity through repetition without being monotonous or annoying. Let's look at the following example, for a regional soft drink:

MAN: Boy, am I *hot*! Don't think I'll enjoy dinner tonight.

WOMAN: You *will*...we're having *Fizz* to drink.

MAN: Fizz?

WOMAN: Sure...Fizz, the bubbly new drink that looks refreshing, sounds refreshing, *is* refreshing.

MAN: Looks refreshing, sounds refreshing, *is* refreshing? Hmm. Hand me a bottle of that Fizz. Say! Fizz does *look* refreshing.

(SOUND OF BOTTLE TOP BEING REMOVED...THEN DRINK BEING POURED OVER ICE)

MAN: Fizz *sounds* refreshing...

WOMAN: Now, give Fizz the test that really counts.

MAN: Wow! Fizz *is* refreshing. I'm hungry already.

WOMAN: Fizz looks refreshing, sounds refreshing, *is* refreshing.

MAN: This summer, let's serve Fizz at every meal.

WOMAN: Well, maybe not breakfast.

In 45 seconds, the name Fizz is mentioned ten times. The central selling theme, "Looks refreshing, sounds refreshing, *is* refreshing," is repeated four times.

### REPEATING THE CLIENT'S NAME

Of course, this extremely high repetition rate is not always desirable or necessary. If you're writing copy for a retailer who wants to list a multitude of items in his copy, you may have time to mention the central selling idea only at the beginning and end of the commercial. The theme may be only low price. In such a case, link the *client's name* with the merchandise, whether you're dealing with one item or many items. For example: Jones Brothers Sofas. Flowers from Carlisle, etc.

Often you hear *we* or *they* used in copy to refer to the advertiser. Just as often, the *we* is read by a station announcer who couldn't possibly be the "we" referred to by the commercial. This destroys the credibility of the commercial and wastes a perfect opportunity to mention the sponsor's name. Only in the following special cases should you use *we*, *us*, and *they*:

- 1) If the speaker is a recognized spokesman for the company, for example: "This is Jack Martin for the Martin Service Stations. *We* want you to come to our Grand Opening..." etc.
- 2) If the commercial is a dialog spot where constant repetition of the client's name would be forced and phony; for example:  
A: Is this the Martin Service Station I've heard about?  
B: It sure is. We're having our Grand Opening today.
- 3) If you'd be forced into an awkward sentence by repeating the client's name twice in the same sentence. In this case, you will usually find you can divide the idea into two sentences. Try it.

You may be wondering: Is it *always* necessary to constantly repeat the client's name? No. In multi-item spots, the repetition is necessary:

- 1) to provide continuity, and
- 2) to keep the sponsor from getting lost in all those words.

Many spots, however, can be effective when the sponsor's name is used only once or twice, perhaps as a surprise ending (when the spot is really *intriguing enough* to keep people listening until the end).

But such sparing use of the client's name should be used only when the copy lends itself easily to the contrivance and, generally, when the client's name and reputation are already known in the community.

For the average retail spot, use the client's name every chance you get—as *naturally* as possible. He'll love it—and the business it brings him.

### REPEATING THE THEME

The theme of a national advertiser stays the same for years. For example:

Winston tastes good like a cigarette should.  
Outstanding. And—they are mild!  
Promise her anything—but give her Arpege.

A local retailer may have a slogan which stays the same but the theme of his copy may change from day to day:

- No down payment during this special sale
- Lawnmowers—five dollars—today
- Free trading stamps when you visit
- Main Street Market today

The retail business is a fast-changing business and the themes of commercials can change from commercial to commercial. That's why repetition within commercials is important. Whatever you're trying to sell, tell about it *simply* and *often*.

### EXERCISES

1. Write a commercial repeating a client's name at least ten times. Does it sound *natural*? If not, perhaps eight times will do.
2. Devise a theme for a department store and write a commercial that repeats this theme at least five times. Read it aloud. Would it "sell" you? If not, devise a theme for a *competing* department store and try again. Note: A good technique of repetition is to use two announcers rather than one—as in the Fizz commercial.
3. Mental muscle stretching time: Think of something unique about the common lead pencil. Write a commercial message promoting its advantages over other writing instruments. Repeat your basic idea as often as possible.

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## 9

# Keep It Simple, Keep It Short

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Keep it simple. A commercial isn't the time or place for complex thoughts. Keep it short. All those words get in the way of what you're saying. Keep your message simple, sharp, and straight as a nail. Drive it home again, and again, and again.

A good writer can say more in 12 words than an ordinary writer can say with 112! An ordinary writer may devote a full minute to *freshness* and *low price* of a grocer's crabmeat...going into comparisons, urgings, etc. Another writer can use just the following 12 words: "The crabs you buy here today slept last night in Wautak Bay."

Notice? Not even a mention of price is needed in the second example. That 12-word message appears over a waterfront store on a billboard, but that *kind* of uncluttered simplicity should be used for your radio/TV commercials, with some skillful repetition where it counts:

- 1) around the central selling idea
- 2) of the client's name

Recently, agencies and advertisers alike have been concerned with surveys which show that 85% of all advertising is ignored. I believe it. The average person has access to a dozen or more radio signals, three to six TV stations, newspapers, magazines (dozens!), and who knows how many church programs and other miscellaneous advertising media. What this means is that people are not

going to make any effort to find the main point of your commercials. You must make the effort for them. Analyze your client's product, store, or sale. What is the *best* benefit you can promise? How can you *best* express the benefit? Be concrete. Be simple.

Your commercials succeed only when they are direct, to the point, and sharp enough to cut through all the words in today's oversaturated media. Who succeeded in penetrating the morass of modern pocketbook fiction and mediocre novels? Hemingway is one writer who did. At times, he worked all day on a single paragraph, hacking out unnecessary verbiage, leaving either pure thought or pure story.

You may not be able to spend all day on a commercial. And advertising isn't fiction. But Hemingway's meanings hit just about everybody who read them. Yours should, too.

Resist the urge to put everything you can think of about a client into a commercial—even if he wants you to! If you must, write it until it's out of your system, then *distill* what you've got. Edit out all the obvious nonessentials before retyping. Edit again and smooth out while retyping each time.

A good way to force yourself to write simple copy is to write *short* copy. Most one-minute commercials are about 150 words long. Keep your word count down to 125. Then, specify that the announcer read those 125 words precisely, believably, conversationally. Make it easy for people listening to understand *every word*...and they will.

### EXERCISES

1. Select a newspaper sale and write a 150-word (or longer) commercial about it. Cut it to 125 words (or less). Read both of them aloud. Which is the more effective?
2. Listen carefully to the radio in the morning. Notice how few facts you actually remember out of all of those commercials. Did the commercials which seemed to contain the fewest words per minute make the best and longest-lasting impressions?

## Put a Hook on Your Line

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When writing a commercial, tie a “hook” to the *beginning* of your line. A “hook” is an attention-getting device, a sound or a group of words which entice the consumer to listen, to take notice. Advertising, in short, is a buyer’s market. No consumer *has* to listen to your commercials. He can listen to others—or none at all. In fact, nobody *could* pay attention to every message that wants to be heard, so most things get skipped or scanned over.

That’s why we scan newspapers for headlines that “hook” us into the stories that follow. Similarly, attention can wander from even a favorite TV situation comedy. Sometimes a burst of laughter from the screen regains our attention, and we realize we’ve missed something. We missed what was said because we “tuned out” or built a wall of resistance to the TV impressions that weren’t quite interesting enough to keep us watching. Significantly, this “wall” usually springs up when a commercial comes at us.

You can’t force someone to listen to you. But you *can* make them *want* to listen to you. You can actually make people stop whatever they are doing and even turn up the radio or TV in order to pay strict attention to your commercial. How do you hook this attention? One way is to arouse curiosity:

What downtown store is selling Cantreце stockings  
for one dollar a pair this morning?

Are *you* driving a “haunted car”?

You can also hook attention by making highly unusual statements—but you’d better be able to follow up the hook with a logically presented benefit:

(SOUND OF CLOCK TICKING)

It happens 525,000 times a year...Another minute slips by...you’ve missed another opportunity to get a gleaming minute car wash at Jet Service. Take a minute—and let’s tick off the reasons why you should drive your car to Jet Service for a sparkling bright wash job. Jet uses only soft water treated with a filmy wax to really remove dirt and let your car body shine like the day it was new. Jet takes the same pride you do in shining your car. Jet’s downtown location is convenient; there’s no waiting; and the price is just two dollars.

(CLOCK TICKING)

If you had driven in to Jet Service when this commercial began, your car would be gleaming right now...Fortunately, another minute is on its way.

As we stated before, the most candid approach is always a good one. What if your client is the underdog? Admit it—in the right way—and you’ve got a clever hook on a candid approach. Avis Rent-A-Car demonstrated this by “We’re only No. 2.”

You won’t want to use this same approach (it’s a bad habit to play copycat in the advertising field), but the whole line of reasoning is sound advertising. We’ve mentioned the car dealer who admitted “You probably don’t think of us first when you think of buying an Oldsmobile.” He improved his standing very easily; and, in his area, most people probably *do* think of him first, now.

Another way to hook attention is to use low price or some aspect of saving. “More for your money” is one of the strongest motivating forces in today’s retail advertising. “Get a month’s supply of A-2 vitamins free” is a *hook*; follow it with “...when you choose the large size of this

important vitamin for your family at Rake's Pharmacy," or whatever *line* suits your client's situation.

The attention-getting techniques we've been discussing all are related to the commercial's *central selling idea*. You can make a specific statement about the central idea—or ask a question about it.

The "question" technique in itself can be very valuable. The lawnmower commercial in an earlier chapter might have started

Where in the world can you buy a new lawnmower for just five dollars?

If you are remotely interested in buying a lawnmower, your attention is riveted. You want to find out the answer to the question and more about the lawnmower. You're *listening*.

A bank got real results by asking the following question in its radio commercials:

"What secrets do millionaires know about saving money?"

Who could resist turning up the attention? It seems to be a fact, though, that few things are harder than to create commercials that get action for a bank. Reason: Banks usually won't go along with the ideas. As a copywriter, you may have the harder job selling to the bank than to the public.

Do situation commercials need hooks? Yes. Arouse curiosity, be specific, be shockingly candid, use the "question" technique, or make a highly unusual statement...and always relate these hooks to the Central Selling Idea.

In hooking attention, here are some things it's better *not* to do:

- 1) Begin with a trite sound effect: fire siren, dinner bell, auto crash, etc.
- 2) Begin with a jingle.
- 3) Begin with the words "Unlike most commercials..."



Let's examine reasons for the above taboos. If your commercial opens with a much-used sound effect, your listeners will greet it with, "Oh, I know what's coming," and stop listening. And, no matter how well planned your message itself might be, it's lost.

Jingles are fine—after a selling message, where they don't warn, "Here comes a commercial!" Place your jingle at the end of the commercial; it will do a good job of leaving your *client's name* with your listeners. But jingles are poor at providing "reason why" benefits.

There are exceptions to the above, as you're probably thinking. At times, you can sell an idea *better* with a jingle. It depends on the product. Products like beer and soft drinks are so similar that the image created by the jingle may be the only distinctive thing in the consumer's mind. That's why many such products feature a jingle and *only* a jingle in their radio/TV advertising. As you may have noticed, most beer and soft drink *magazine* ads aren't as effective as their radio/TV counterparts. The reason, probably, is that without the jingle, the product distinction is lacking.

Jingles, then, can be very useful—as a memory device, not as a hook.

You've heard the commercials that say they aren't commercials. They begin:

Unlike most commercials you hear that make fantastic claims, we want to do a little "straight talking" about...

Or

Most commercials start out with sound effects, jingles, or at least a little background music. Well, we don't think we need all that to tell you about such-and-such...

These commercials *might* (and I emphasize *might*) have been effective the first time around. Now all they do is

say. "Here I am, a sneaky commercial...and not a very good one at that...and besides, I'm both apologizing for my breed and kicking them in the teeth at the same time."

So much for the *don'ts*. You'll know whether you've followed the *dos* for an effective hook by asking yourself after every opening sentence you write. "Would this make *me* want to listen further?" Be rough in your answer to this question. The public will be.

### EXERCISES

1. Write a hook for a sale at Hupplemeyer's that
  - makes a concrete statement about savings
  - asks a question
  - arouses curiosity
2. Write the beginning of a situation commercial that effectively hooks the listener on the idea of having a certain brand of milk delivered at home.
3. Listen carefully to the radio or watch TV for the commercials. Jot down those elements which actually hooked you. What techniques were used?

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# 11

## The Stinger

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A “stinger” is a concluding device that helps give a commercial more impact. A commercial without a stinger on its tail is like a salesman who fascinates you with his product and then walks off without asking for the sale.

A stinger can be anything from a surprising bit of news about the product or client to a sharp, competitive selling point, to a mundane but outright request for the sale. Or it can be a good, crisp restatement of the central selling theme. Or, in some cases, even an irrelevant bit of humor. The point is, it's got to be there.

### THE UNEXPECTED

Commercials, considered in a body, are as predictable as a Tom & Jerry cartoon. You know by now that Tom Cat is going to be outwitted by Jerry Mouse after a hair-raising chase and some unfunny attempts to kill each other. A cartoon filler before the main attraction can afford to get a few yawns. You can't. So you have to say unexpected things in a commercial in order to make people react to what you say.

Therefore, the most effective stinger is one the listener least expects but which is at the same time relevant. One of the example commercials in Chapter 4 offered a *free* tuneup

during a car dealer's grand opening. The unexpected stinger was: *It's yours...to the tune of just \$3492!*  
A similar unexpected stinger for a luxury downtown apartment-house-plus-pool might be:

Where the long drive to the suburbs begins—for some people.

Or

Move downtown and swim home.

When you say, in the preceding bank commercial, "Laugh all the way to the car dealer's," you're not being exactly shocking. But you are saying something which is a bit different from ordinary bank copy. One bank went much further and had a grandmother saving for karate lessons. It worked.

If you have a client whose name is unusual, do the unexpected. Point the fact out:

Hardtack...that's a funny name for a bakery.

Is your client being clobbered by the competition? Look for—or create—an unexpected advantage.

You can shop and save at Sam's Super Market *hours* after the Safeway and Jewel stores are closed. So shop when the time suits *you*. Save on groceries at Sam's Super Market all the way up to midnight.

Do the unexpected—but be sure you are being faithful to your central selling idea. Don't be unusual just for the sake of being unusual.

## JUST FOR LAUGHS

Some stingers break all the rules and still get remembrance and results. They might best be described as

nonsequiturs. In the hands of a comic team like Nichols and May, they are good advertising as well as good comedy. For example, in their TV commercial for Jax Beer, a waitress refuses to serve beer to a horse. The horse ends with, "Oh, that's okay...I'm not driving." Stan Freberg sometimes ends a commercial with this kind of humor although most of his stingers are in the "sell" category.

Let's take the stinger of this commercial as an example for discussion:

MAN: (BATHTUB BARITONE, SINGS) Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti...(PAUSE; REPEATS) Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti...

WOMAN: Dear, would you please finish singing it? You're driving me crazy.

MAN: No, I'm driving you to Used Car Roundup.

WOMAN: But what about the *do*?

MAN: Don't need any.

WOMAN: What?

MAN: At Used Car Roundup, you don't *need* any dough. They'll take our car as down payment on a new kind of service-free used car. And prices are low.

WOMAN: Well, I think it's low of you not to finish the song.

(SOUND OF CAR DOORS CLOSING)

MAN: What song is that, dear?

WOMAN: You know—the one that goes, Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti—Finish it! What comes next?

(SOUND OF CAR STARTING)

MAN: Used Car Roundup—where we won't need any (SINGS) DO!

The ending of this commercial is pertinent to the total spot, rounds it out, makes it a complete story or playlet. Notice that every word is aimed toward the ending, giving the commercial focus and direction. The ending doesn't come from nowhere but has been motivated or "set up" throughout the spot. Here's another example:

1ST MAN: (OLD VOICE) Haven't bought a car now in nigh onta thirty years.

2ND: Thirty years?

1ST: Yep. I keep old Bessie goin' nicely. Back when I bought her thirty years ago, buyin' a car was a matter of dignity.

2ND: But *that's* when J & K Oldsmobile went into business. You've been missing the best years of car buying!

1ST: You mean the J & K that's havin' the trade-in sale now? They're the ones that sold me Bessie. Gave me such a good deal I figgered it was a mistake. 'Fraid if I go back they'll try to get her away from me.

2ND: Oh, they will...they will. In trade on a new seventy-seven.

This time the stinger does not present a selling point or benefit, as did the first example, but it still rounds out the spot in a way that was set up earlier in the dialog.

The basic principle here should seem familiar to you. Your favorite TV comedy show sets up the punchlines and the climax with "motivators" that give the characters reasonable reasons for what they say and do. You get a jolt out of a detective story's surprise ending because the motivation was in plain sight all along. You sit back and nod and say, "Oh, yes. I see how it would have happened that way."

A story with a complete surprise for an ending usually does not get published. Remember, when you are writing a humorous stinger for a commercial, set it up!

### ASKING FOR THE SALE

Some commercials sell by entertaining, but they entertain the man who is paying the bill only when they sell his product. So never be hesitant about asking for the sale in the commercial. The stinger is an effective place to do it.

You may want to ask for the sale *directly*. If the price of the item being advertised is exceptionally low—e.g., if your client is selling lawnmowers for \$5—stress this in both the hook and the stinger. That fact alone could be used as a stinger: "Five dollars buys a lawnmower at Finklemeier's today."

If more urging seems in order, add a limited-time device:

After today, the price is \$12.95. Buy a new lawnmower for only five dollars, only at Finklemeier's, and only *today*.

If you're dealing with an extended sale and want to create this "only today!" feeling *every* day, write the commercial as though "only today" *were* the sale day, then "tag" the daily spots with a variation of this idea:

There are four days left to buy Fifth Avenue nylons at Husston's special price of...

Or

For two more days, Husston's offers Fifth Avenue nylons at a special price...

In the stinger, you can also ask for a sale *indirectly*. Here's one simple way: "Five dollars buys a lawnmower at Finklemeier's today. Interested?"

The word *interested* is an interesting stinger in the preceding example. It implies that while Finklemeier has all those lawnmowers for sale for \$5, and while he *does* want to sell them, and while he *is* asking for your business...he will sell those lawnmowers to someone if *you* are not interested. Interested?

#### **A-I-D-A FORMULA**

As we have seen, a commercial should do four things in approximately this order:

Get <i>Attention</i>	"Hook" the listener. Give the Central Selling Idea.
Build <i>Interest</i>	Present the facts, realistically. Add urgency as needed.
Increase <i>Desire</i>	Show how the listener will <i>benefit</i> . Be concrete. Sell.
Get <i>Action</i>	Ask for the sale. Sting the listener with something that helps him make up his mind to buy.

This is the A-I-D-A formula; it holds for any type of commercial.

### EXERCISES

1. In the last set of exercises, you wrote a hook for a milk commercial. Now, create two or three possible stingers that might be used with it. If this results in your having to rewrite the commercial two or three times, don't worry. It's good practice.
2. Your client, as you know, is selling lawnmowers for \$5. How would you "sting" commercials
  - humorously?
  - with a straight selling proposition?
  - with a dig at the competition?

Think of several ways to end commercials with an *indirect* request for the sale.

3. Watch more TV commercials, paying close attention to the stingers. Can you think of more effective ways to end the commercials you see? Write a few examples.



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## 12

# Motivating The Consumer: How It's Done

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What do you do when you want someone to do something for you? Do you scream at him, demanding that he hurry? In everyday situations, probably you do not. Rather, you say what you want in a nice, easy way. You don't command; you give a concrete, calm reason to hurry. He is far more willing to do what you want when he's *asked*, not *told*—and given a *reason*, not an *argument*.

I'm sure you understand the implications for advertising. Loud, high-pressure (so-called "hard sell") commercials are supposed to do just that: sell hard. But there is no proof that these actually get response, and there is much indication that they repel potential customers. Actually, "hard sell" is whatever does a strong job of motivating people to act—something that high-pressure commercials don't do.

### FRIENDLY PERSUASION

People tend to listen to what they already agree with. They seek out support for their already formed opinions. Don't you? During a political election, which candidate do you listen to? The candidate you're *not* going to vote for? Or the candidate you *are* going to vote for, so you'll have more support for a decision you've already made?

The best way to *change* a person's mind is to begin by agreeing with him—and slowly turn the talk around to *your*

point of view. Get him saying “yes” to points of common agreement and you’ll be more likely to get him saying “yes” when you want him to agree to your proposition. Here’s one example of how to do this when you’re trying to sell against the tide of popular buying habits:

Whatever happened to tail fins? *I loved ’em*. I remember the day I finally bought a car that had ’em...big ones...the day *before* they went out of style. Boy, I’ll be *darned* if those car manufacturers will play games with *me* again. It’s bad enough the way the dress designers keep my *wife* on a string. *I’m* tired of having out-of-style cars unloaded on me at phony end-of-year savings...That’s why I drive an MG from Smith Imports. You’ll never catch Smith Imports selling you a fad that’s going to go out of style faster than my wife’s wardrobe. And here’s a bonus for buying a Smith Imports MG now—you get a front seat to watch all the *other* cars going out of style!

You don’t always have to go to quite so much effort to get another person on your side. Sometimes just agreeing with him is enough to cause him to listen to you:

If you’ve never shopped here at DeWitt’s, it’s probably because you think we’re pretty expensive. Well, we’re not cheap. But then, neither is our clothing. Frankly, we don’t think you want cheap clothing that comes apart at the seams a month after you buy it. As our customers will tell you, our clothing isn’t cheap. They’ll also tell you, though, that our swimsuits swim through summer after summer. Our coats see winter after winter of wear—and *still* look and act like new. When you get right down to it, we think that at DeWitt’s we offer you an *inexpensive* way to dress.

The idea throughout is to get listeners to spend money with the advertiser, not because *you* want them to spend it—but because *they* want to spend it. The simplest way to motivate a person to buy is to begin by *seeing things from his point of view*, the process known as “empathy.”

Why should someone save at a bank, for instance? Think of *yourself* as the customer (empathy) and consider what would make *you* want to save (motivation) at a certain bank, and you have a base on which to build the A-I-D-A formula. Here's an example:

MAN: Laugh all the way to the bank? Why, I got a loan from 1st National Bank and laughed all the way to the car dealer's. (LAUGHS)

WOMAN: I laughed all the way to the furniture store.

TEEN VOICE: I laughed all the way to the cycle shop.

MAN: I laughed all the way to the real estate office. (LAUGHS)

MAN: I laughed all the way to the boat show.

WOMAN: I laughed all the way to the spring fashion showings.

WOMAN: I laughed all the way to *Europe!* (FADING OUT) Paris, Venice, Rome...

MAN: My wife showed me all the monthly bills...and I just laughed.

(LAUGHTER UNDER)

ANNCR: Need money—for anything? See 1st National Bank. It *is* a laughing matter.

Follow the same procedure for every commercial you write. Only if you discover what motivates people can you possibly know what will

- attract their *attention*
- get their *interest*
- arouse their *desire* to buy
- get *action* for your client

## SAYS WHO?

Another consideration is the consumer's tendency to react with a skeptical "Says who?" to unsubstantiated claims. A claim—out of the blue—isn't the best way to motivate. You say, "Our brand is mildest," and the listener

replies, consciously or subconsciously, “Says who?” and shuts you out. The same reasoning applies to lines like

Everybody’s doing it...  
It’s the only way to live...

Instead, say things you can back up.

The latest Federal Testing Bureau figures show that our air-conditioner costs less to run than other models...

This last example is an ear-pricking bit of information. Anyone interested in buying an air-conditioner would find it hard not to listen further. And no one is going to react with “Says who?”—you’ve told him already!

Remember that it’s never enough to say that your product is good. Present by analogy—or demonstrate by situation—just *how* good it is. Notice that the air-conditioning copy doesn’t talk in terms of the “best.” Most people automatically disbelieve words about a product which does claim to be “best,” merely because there are so *many* “best” things around! So why cloud the issue?

Instead, describe your product in such vivid terms that the listener can’t resist finding out more about it. Be clear—different—vivid—realistic. The consumer will decide for himself what’s “best,” anyway.

### **DON’T BE NARCISSISTIC**

It’s one thing to compare your product factually with another. This is the kind of information people need in order to make an intelligent buying decision. But no one needs to know, nor really cares, that more people buy from a particular store or that so-and-so is Number 1 in sales, etc.

Sales leadership *can* be turned into a benefit if the high volume actually means lower prices. Talk in terms of the *benefit*, not the size of your client’s operation. For example, if you were writing copy for a large department store in your town, you would not dwell on the store’s size. The bigger you puffed the client up, the smaller and less

significant each average customer would feel, and these average customers made the store a successful operation in the first place.

Instead, be like a department store owner I know who does his own commercials. He says something like:

Come on in and ask for me. I'm always down on the floor because I like talking with you personally as you shop. I want to know how you think our store can better serve you...

How many department stores get down to this person-to-person basis? If your advertising for a department store makes customers feel *valuable* to the store, you'll have a satisfied client.

### EXERCISES

1. Memorize the A-I-D-A formula. Write a commercial for any product, following the formula.
2. Write another commercial for the same product modifying your approach to sell as "hard" as possible.

## The Straight Commercial

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Nothing is duller on radio or TV than an announcer reading a canned pitch about toothpaste or the sale at the BonTon. Follow the A-I-D-A formula, and make your one-announcer spots interesting, with vivid language, urgent verbs, and a touch of the unusual or the unexpected.

Take a minute and glance back through the straight commercials given as examples in previous chapters. Although they illustrate a specific point, most of them also meet the test for a "total" commercial: they get attention, interest, desire, action. The lawnmower and dress commercials in Chapter 5, for example, are built on the formula, with the result that they get across the idea of high quality and low price.

Selling products without price requires a different approach. The quality of the item must be so graphically stated, in such a distinctive way, that the listener is intrigued (all questions of price aside). The key to this kind of descriptive writing is to write *vividly*. What is your reaction to the following commercial?

(SOUND OF COMPUTERS)

In this computer age we're living in, what chance does one bank have to stand out from any other bank? When one gets a new computer...

(CHANGE IN COMPUTER SOUND)

They all get new computers...

(SOUND SWELLS)

and to the customers the only difference in banks is one of proximity. That's why we at First National Bank have taken a giant step backward....

(SOUNDS STOP SUDDENLY)

(UP SOUNDS OF NATURE)

back to a time when people made a difference. Oh, we still have computers—can't seem to escape them—but the computers are behind the people, instead of vice versa. At First National Bank we'll try to help you, no matter what your financial problem. And if we should ever make a mistake, well remember, we're only...people.

In the above commercial the A-I-D-A formula is followed by inference. It gets attention by arousing interest. Through understatement it makes the point that the bank's people make a difference in service. In fact, understatement is one way to avoid the cliches of advertising. Notice how the few simple sounds work with the words to paint a mental picture of what would otherwise be an abstract notion.

The job of being "straight" and vivid at the same time is one of the most pleasant—and challenging—parts of copywriting. Here's a more simply presented commercial that still manages to be vivid:

A picture-taking moment is like a dollar bill. Once that moment is spent you never see it again. So when you capture a magic moment on film, take it to Photo-Rite. Be *sure* of precision finishing. Photo-Rite prints are sharp and bright as a new pair of scissors. The subject comes alive on the print...as alive as the moment you snapped the shutter.

### SUMMARY CHECKLIST

Study this checklist until you know it well. It sums up everything we've covered so far about copywriting; a glance over it should recall each major point we've discussed. Check your commercials against it.

POINT

YES NO

Does the hook arouse curiosity?

Does the hook refer in some way to the Central Selling Idea?

Is the Central Selling Idea a good one?

Is the Central Selling Idea pertinent?

Does the copy stick to the facts, avoiding generalities?

Are cliches avoided?

Are simple, direct verbs used to make the copy urgent?

Is descriptive, vivid, precise language used?

Do short sentences (containing only one idea) predominate?

Is the language positive, natural, easy to understand?

Is the client's name mentioned often?

Is the Central Selling Idea mentioned often?

Is there anything surprising or unexpected about the commercial?

If a straight commercial, is the pronoun *you* used often?

Does the commercial point up a single basic selling idea?

Is the ending an effective stinger?

There will be exceptions, of course; but as you check commercials you've written against the above questions, most of your answers should be "yes."



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# 14

## The Situation Commercial

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How often have you seen or heard a commercial that began with two people discussing a normal everyday problem when suddenly the sponsor's name comes up, problems are solved, and the commercial concludes with one of the people saying, "Well, I can't talk any longer; I'm on my way to Snook's Department Store—I just can't resist Snook's"? Then, the other party says, apparently to a blank wall, "That's Snook's Department Store, 1210 North Main."

If you write a situation commercial, *make it an entertainingly realistic situation.*

Even an inept straight commercial is not as offensive as phony conversation. We've already said, "Write the way you talk." It is doubly important to write a situation commercial the way people talk. As a matter of fact, the advantage of a situation commercial is that it—if well done—does not sound like a commercial. People don't listen to the radio for the commercials. But they will listen to, enjoy, and act on a situation spot that is entertainingly realistic. Naturally, it must also present the selling promise or benefit convincingly.

Let's review three important points before going on to discuss situation writing:

- 1) Hook the listener so that he *wants* to listen.
- 2) Write the selling message the way people talk. No one "drops everything" or gets overly excited

about a product. They usually just like it.

- 3) Relate your stinger to the hook of the commercial or to the Central Selling Idea of your message.

Often when you decide to use the situation technique, you want a commercial to be humorous. An easy way to do this is to be absurd:

MR. G: Miss Jones...

MS. J: Yes, Mr. Goldfeller?

MR. G: I wonder if you'd run down to McCarthy Ford and get me a six-pack.

MS. J: Uh, but, Mr. Goldfeller, McCarthy Ford sells cars.

MR. G: Yes, yes, of course. And I want you to pick me up a nice assortment while you're down there.

MS. J: Uh, but a six-pack?

MR. G: They're a volume dealer, don't they say?

MS. J: Ah, well, yes Mr. Goldfeller, but...

MR. G: And they sell just slightly fewer cars than Detroit itself, don't they?

MS. J: Yes, Mr. Goldfeller, but...

MR. G: So we couldn't do better at the factory, could we Miss Jones?

MS. J: But a six-pack of McCarthy Fords?

MR. G: Yes, I guess it is rather bad business judgment.

MS. J: Hurrumph. Whatever you say, Mr. Goldfeller.

MR. G: Guess they *would* be cheaper by the dozen.

Real people do not talk like that, but in this case the situation is so exaggerated that the sales point (high volume, low prices) is made by virtue of the exaggeration. This is a special case in which the importance of gaining believability is suspended such the way that "the willing suspension of disbelief" serves the dramatic stage. This has been, and probably will continue to be, a popular form of advertising on radio, although my personal preference leans toward more realistic forms of copy.

However, for making an otherwise mundane sales point, comic exaggeration is hard to beat:

MAN: It's your first day as receptionist at Smith Chevrolet, Miss Pinch; how do you like it so far?

GIRL: Well, it kinda makes me happy and sad all at the same time.

MAN: Oh?

GIRL: Every time I get attached to one of these beautiful new cars...

MAN: Oh yeah...

GIRL: ...somebody comes in and buys it.

MAN: Well, you'll have to get used to that, Honey. Nobody beats Smith Chevrolet's good deals; so our cars don't stay here long. Why, we sell just slightly fewer cars than the factory itself.

GIRL: It's just that I have a strong attachment for things. I guess.

MAN: Well, there's one consolation, Miss Pinch. As quickly as we sell a Smith Chevrolet, we get a brand new replacement from the factory.

GIRL: My gracious!

MAN: Yes...

GIRL: What with all these good deals you've been making...

MAN: Yeah...

GIRL: ...we must be getting in new cars by the trainload.

MAN: (LAUGH) Well, at Smith Chevrolet, it's easy come, easy go.

A general rule for writing situation commercials is *don't write a line that doesn't further the sale of the product you're writing about*. The best way to make selling points is to *build* one on another until you reach a climax. The climax should be the strongest selling point of all and is doubly effective if made—or repeated—in the last line of the commercial.

In the following commercial the last line is a gag line. Gag lines should usually double as *sell* lines. If they don't, the client's name should appear *just before* the gag line.

WOMAN: So there I was! Surrounded by acres and acres of new clothes!

MAN: New clothes? You must mean...

WOMAN: Discount City.

MAN: You? Buy clothes from a discount house?

WOMAN: Not a house, a city. As chic as Paris. But with prices that would put Paris in the poorhouse.

MAN: Usually you put *me* in the poorhouse. Tell me, weren't you scared? Surrounded by acres and acres of new clothes? What did you do to get out of Discount City?

WOMAN: Bought my way out. It was easy.

Here are some other things to remember when writing situation spots:

Write short, conversational sentences.

Make every line a sell line; make it point up the product.

Build the situation a step at a time, starting with an effective hook.

The last line should be a snappy stinger and the strongest selling point. (This is not always observed, even in the best commercials, but work for it.)

### EXERCISES

1. Take one of the straight commercials in this book and rewrite it as a situation commercial.
2. For a new brand of coffee, El Caffo, write a situation dialog between a sexy wife and a man who hates to wake up in the morning.
3. Now write a straight commercial about El Caffo. Give your best to both approaches before deciding which you think will sell more effectively.

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# 15

## Sale Copy and the Sale

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*Sale* is like the magnetic word *free*. Exposure hasn't worn it out. In fact, as the use of sales has steadily increased among all kinds of merchandisers, the public has become more and more conditioned to *Sale!* as a signal for money-saving.

On the other side of the coin: as consumers are faced with more and more sales, fewer and fewer respond *automatically*. Instead, thoughtful consumers ask themselves, "Why is the store willing to save me so much money? They aren't in business for their health."

### REASONS FOR SALES

To have a sale, then, you should have a believable *reason* for one, such as:

- |                                 |                               |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| —we're overstocked              | —new management               |
| —end of season                  | —discontinued merchandise     |
| —moving                         | —old merchandise              |
| —preinventory                   | (in stock over 90 days, etc.) |
| —special purchase               | —store opening                |
| —fire                           | —remodeling                   |
| —flood                          | —going out of business        |
| —introductory offer             | (Hopefully, you won't have    |
| (new line of merchandise, etc.) | too many of these.)           |

Remember to sell not only the sale but the reason for the sale.

There are some exceptions, however—some sales that do not have to be equipped with reasons. For example,

many stores have successful annual sales, birthday sales, white sales, etc., with no explanation necessary, because these sales have proven themselves in customer experience.

Other types of sales (end of season, for example) require no explanation. Customers today know that merchandise changes with the seasons—and that with each seasonal change the older goods go on sale.

Items such as furniture do not change seasonally. That's why most successful furniture sales are accompanied by a reason. For example:

- overstocked sale
- discontinued line
- warehouse sale of odds and ends
- clearance sale of floor samples, etc.

Using such titles, the furniture retailer may classify his entire inventory as “odds and ends” or “floor samples” and thus put them on sale.

Appliances and automobiles have new models every year. *End-of-model-year* clearance sales are usually winners, as are *demonstrator* sales.

*Special purchase* sales can be called any time, under any conditions, and for any kind of merchandise. The reason for the sale? “We’ve just bought out a huge supply of widgets at an unusually low price.” Give the sale a distinctive slant with the personal story of how the buyer made this purchase. This approach could use humorous copy.

Another gambit is the *overstocked* sale which can always be followed by an *understocked* sale. This second type asks customers to help clear out the odds and ends. A *limited* sale is one version of the understocked sale and has a high success rate. Instead of aiming your advertising at everyone, use this technique to aim at the few. Say:

We’re talking to the lucky 15 ladies whose feet will fit the remaining pairs of Capezio shoes in our fashion salon. If they fit *you*, they’re yours for just \$6 a pair.

Or:

Men, if you're willing to sacrifice color and detail-preferences for real savings, we have a dozen \$100 suits—now priced at just \$50. One of them may be right for you...

Don't confuse a *Limited Sale* with a *Limited-Time* sale. A limited-time device (such as "Only three more days...") can be an effective addition to *any* type of sale. A veiled threat—in this case, the threat of missing out on something valuable—is often a good way to get action.

### EXPLOITING THE SALE

Give a lot of *thought* to the following attention-getting gimmicks before deciding to use them. They are often effective, but they are *unoriginal*—and their effectiveness depends on the size of the sale you are advertising and the buyers you want to reach:

- 1) Extending store hours—even to 24 hours.
- 2) Hiring local personalities or well-known entertainer to appear.
- 3) Giving door prizes (Choose them carefully; if the free gift is worthless, it's no benefit!)
- 4) Saturating the media with sale announcements.
- 5) Announcing sale items by store loudspeaker.
- 6) Launching balloons; other stunts.

### SALE COPY

Thus far, we've said a lot about sales but very little about sale copy. But a sale should be exciting, dramatic, and believable *first*; so it's important that it be well planned. It's hard to save a poorly conceived sale with good copy. When you're ready to write the copy, however, announce the sale the way a reporter presents a front page story—telling who, what, when, where, why, and how.

*Who* is giving the sale? (Since this question is answered by your client's name, you'll want to repeat it as often as feasible).

*What* kind of sale is it?

*Where* is it?

*When* is it? (How long will it last?)

*Why* is the sale being given?

*How* much can be saved?

Using the above approach, generally keep the copy straight. Use crisp sentences, action verbs, and vivid adjectives. Build on *facts*. Use words such as *now*, *save*, *time- or stock-limited* to give urgency.

Copy can be humorous, but if the client regularly runs copy that is on the funny side, it is better to contrast it with straighter, more urgent copy for the sale.

### **SELL THE IDEA—NOT THE ITEMS**

Here is where good copy sense and the client part company. Most clients want to jam everything, including the kitchen sink (if it is on sale), into their sale copy. They expect one or two radio or TV spots to duplicate everything they put into a \$1000 newspaper page.

Not only is it impossible to duplicate newspaper listings on radio or TV, it is inefficient use of the latter media. When possible, do not try to sell the items; sell the *idea* of the sale. You'll appeal to a wider audience by using two popular items to illustrate all of the savings offered. For instance, if a woman's shop is having a sale, feature *one* dress or coat style that has been popular. Food store? Feature *one* or *two* items (milk, bread, or something else popular with everyone) as an example of savings throughout the store. In this way, you can gear each spot to appeal to the maximum number of people.

With sale copy, as with all kinds of copy, don't let your enthusiasm carry you away. Don't write: *Unbelievable* savings! Be attention-getting: say: *Believable* savings! or something else original. By the same token, do not exaggerate claims. Don't say "Name your own terms" unless the customer really can.

Keep in mind the *facts* of the sale and draw *benefits* from those facts. How will your listeners *benefit* from shopping during your client's sale? A few obvious benefits:

- quality merchandise* at savings
- convenience*



Additional parking space provided during the sale? Quicker, friendlier service? Babysitters provided?

—*terms*

No money down? 24 months to pay?

—*extras*

Free delivery? Free alterations? Free gift with every purchase?

—*exclusives*

First time on sale? Only place in town?

Only time this year?

This is a much more workable approach than trying to sell item-after-item-after-item-after-item. Sell the *idea* of the sale; sell the *benefits*. The items will then take care of themselves.

## NON-SALES

You may find it is not necessary to call every selling event a *sale*. Many large discount houses advertise that they never have sales. They claim their prices are always as low as the sale prices advertised by other stores. Actually, any retailer can adopt such a policy—and never advertise a sale. In fact, it should be obvious that if any *one* store or outlet overuses the “sale” device, the device will kill its own potential effect. The merchant whose goods are *always* “marked down” is like the boy who cried wolf. When he really needs help, no one is going to pay any attention.

## LOTTERIES

During many sales, a free “door prize” is offered. In our affluent society, such a come-on must be worthwhile if it is to draw a crowd. Most people, for example, will prefer a *chance* at getting a convertible, color TV, or trip to Europe to a *certainty* of getting a fountain pen, corsage, or wallet. Thus, the *lottery*.

If your client decides to have a drawing, be aware of the lottery laws. A lottery is constituted when someone has to buy something in order to be eligible to win the prize. Three elements which must be present for a drawing to be a lottery in the eyes of the law are as follows:

- 1) consideration (usually defined as purchase)
- 2) a prize of unquestionable worth
- 3) chance

However, sometimes the law calls the first element, consideration, the mere presence of a person in a place of business. You'll have to check this out with your local district attorney. It is important that you know the law because, as the copywriter, you (and your station or agency) are responsible to the law for a lottery.

You can avoid having a lottery by introducing *skill* into the picture. Real skill must be called for, as well as a competent judging setup. However, usually the request for skill kills any contest. People simply won't write anything in "25 words or less" to win a prize—even a major prize—especially if they have to buy something too.

Simple sweepstakes are popular, and while they don't actively encourage people to buy a product, they do aid in retention of the client's name.

Any of these giveaway devices are often more trouble than their benefits are worth. I've studied the results of several giveaways conducted by a large retail center which revealed *no increase* in business—even though prizes worth thousands of dollars had been given away over a three-month period. Evidently, the giveaways had attracted nonbuyers and made regular customers suspicious as to who ultimately paid for the prizes given away. Today's customer is sharp. Keep this in mind when you are helping to plan, or when you're writing, copy for a sale or lottery.

### EXERCISES

1. It is March 1 and the largest store in town has 140 heavy ladies' winter coats. It will cost them a large portion of their profit to store them until fall—so, the coats are going on sale! Write a commercial that will sell them.
2. The situation is the same as outlined above, except that the store has only 21 coats left. Write a commercial that will sell them.

3. Think up six ideas for exploiting or merchandising a sale at a huge shopping center. Make these original—with real historical interest, curiosity value, etc. For example, antique airplanes could land on a portion of the parking lot for a weeklong display. What else?
4. A local store decides to get off the “sale” treadmill and concentrate instead on the concept of everyday low prices. Write an entire campaign—six to eight commercials—which carries out this theme.

## The Short Spot

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One of the most memorable commercials I've ever heard was for a local automobile raceway; the commercial went:

“TONIGHT...AT PAN AMERICAN  
SPEEDWAY...”  
(SOUND EFFECT: VIOLENT AUTO CRASH)

Generally such short spots are not desirable for local retail advertisers, and only slightly more useful for regionally advertised products. In the first place, it is hard to really *sell* anything within the restricted time limit. In the second place, these ten-second spots are usually sold by the radio or TV station for 50% of the minute rate; so, they're not economical in most circumstances.

An *advantage* of the short commercials is that the sponsor can achieve a repetitive sound on a limited advertising budget. Mere repetition can be effective when the client is well known and when it is not necessary to sell benefits, advantages, locations, etc. The speedway spot just cited is a typical example. The commercial quoted above may not have appeal for the general consumer. But it doesn't have to. It *does* have appeal—and speaks volumes—to the speedway's potential market.

Whether or not they are advisable, every copywriter occasionally must write ten-second spots. In fact the ID, as it is called, is often all that the local television station is able

to sell during prime hours when networks take up most of the commercial time. Although a ten-second commercial is one-sixth as long as a minute commercial, it is definitely not six times easier to write. The sell, the benefit, the ear- and eye-catching possibilities of the minute commercial must be condensed into one high-charged ten-second capsule designed to explode when it hits the consumer's eyes or ears.

Ten-second commercials can be effective in selling a product or service which boasts one definite advantage over its competition:

1ST MAN: Who air-conditioned taxicabs?

2ND MAN: Greenline. That's who.

1ST MAN: Who rides in them?

2ND MAN: Cool passengers.

Obviously, in ten seconds you shouldn't try to say more than that. However, you may find it necessary to insert an address or (if the client insists) a phone number. It's possible to do so, since you *can* use up to 25 words in a ten-second spot. A live announcer might tag off the above commercial with:

Call Greenline Taxi. Plaza 8000.

Another effective use for the ten-second spot is in conjunction with a minute or half-minute schedule. Use the *longer* commercials to sell the product, or event and the *ID* as a memory device. (Repetition builds reputation.)

If a large store is having its annual birthday sale, a simple ten-second announcement will be sufficient to spur the desired traffic:

(HAPPY-BIRTHDAY MUSIC)

It's Happy Birthday for Dorman's...happy savings for *you*...during Dorman's 43rd Birthday Sale...today.

Or, if you are trying to sell something which has few real differences or selling advantages over its competition, such as a bank, the *ID* can help you out with copy like this:

1ST MAN: I managed to save \$100 this year.

2ND MAN: I just saved \$100 in fifteen minutes.

1ST MAN: How did you do *that*?

2ND MAN: Financed my car at City National Bank.

Be as offbeat as you like, without sacrificing believability or pertinence. Here's an ID for a homebuilder; supported by more explanatory advertising, it would be very potent.

This is the world's shortest commercial.

But—if it convinces you to see a Home-Art home, you'll remember it the rest of your life.

Notice that in the short spot, you are forced more than ever to sell an *idea* and not a tangible thing. But if you can get across an *idea* in the ten seconds you've got, don't worry about the details: your listeners will go to the trouble of finding out specifics like address, hours, etc. The short commercial should arouse the consumer's interest. Arouse him often enough and you have a sale.

### EXERCISES

1. Jay's Hardware is having a big sale on nails—all kinds of nails. The store is well-known. Write a ten-second commercial that will sell the idea of a nail sale.
2. A local cola bottler has a limited budget and wants to make his brand better known through repetition. The brand is Carmel Cola. Write three ID spots that will make people really thirsty for this beverage.

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# 17

## Production Technique

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In the beginning there was an *idea*...which was put on paper through the medium of words, and finally aired via the techniques of *production*.

Production is the translation of copy into sound and, in the case of television copy, pictures. Video is explored in the next chapter. For the moment, let's concern ourselves with ways to achieve a superior commercial *sound*.

Even the straightest commercial read by a sober-voiced announcer acquires more sureness, an intangible "presence," and a consistent quality when it is recorded. Recording eliminates fluffs and errors.

Conversely, the advantage of allowing certain station personalities to read copy "live" is that they can inject their own flavor and style into the message. (Let the announcers have the copy—with production notes—in advance of the actual airing.)

### MUSIC

Being a copywriter sometimes involves more than copywriting. You may find yourself often selecting talent, music, sound effects, and performing as producer and director.

If you use music under a commercial, select it to complement the spot, not to call attention to itself. Make sure it will *end* when the spot ends—at a natural break in the

music, not in the middle of a passage. And pay some attention to the overall "sound" of the station airing your commercial. Try to select music that isn't overly similar to that used by *other* of the station's advertisers. If the station of studio's music library is limited, find other sources.

Explore the possibility of getting some original music recorded for your client. There is usually some talent available in most towns and the cost could be written off by the client over several years. Although music can be effective, don't be afraid to leave it out of a commercial! If, for example, the majority of commercials on a station are backgrounded in music, your non-musical message may stand out neatly. And, naturally, you won't want music in a dialogue spot, unless the scene itself calls for it.

In any case, don't back up commercials with *familiar* music. Use music that sets a mood without interfering with the message; a popular tune will drown out the best copy. Unless it is well-integrated into the commercial, music can get in the way of your message and be counter-productive.

## **SOUND EFFECTS**

Sound effects can give your commercials a feeling of reality. Or, they can merely get in the way and clutter up an otherwise crisp, well-written commercial.

Before indicating a sound effect, ask yourself:

Will the sound really add to the copy?

Will it aid the selling message?

Will it sound realistic?

Will it be an integral part of the commercial?

And, even if your answer to all the above questions is "yes," there are two more practical considerations:

Is it available?

Is it worth the effort to find and integrate into the overall production?

Do not use a sound-effect recording that has become scratchy with use; it's better to have *no* sound effects than to use distorted ones that may give the listener an impression of an egg frying.



There are two good libraries of recorded high-fidelity sound effects (on the Audio Fidelity and Electra labels). They provide just about any sound you might want to enhance your commercials, including background sounds of famous places, events, etc. Sound effects by themselves don't mean anything, so be sure to identify them immediately in the copy; notice how following examples do this.

A sound effect can be used to introduce a product quickly:

(QUICK SOUND OF MOTOR REVVING) Hey... where'd you get that motorcycle?

to underline a copy point:

We've built *space* into our homes. Step into one of the walk-in closets. (FIVE SECONDS OF FADING FOOTSTEPS)

to establish atmosphere:

(FOGHORNS IN DISTANCE) You'd never hear this on an expressway...

to set a scene:

(JAZZ CLARINET; TINKLING GLASSES) Nightlife can be anything you want it to be...

to save words:

(SOUND OF BAT HITTING BALL AND CROWD CHEERING) A home *run*? I called for a *bunt*!

to bring the listener as close as possible to a product:

(SOUND OF LIQUID BEING POURED) ALL coffees *sound* alike...but only one has a dark, wine-like flavor...

Sound effects can be one of the most versatile production tools you have. Remember, though, that today's listener has grown too sophisticated to perk up his ears at the sound of a fire engine or any other "gimmick" sound effect used only to attract attention. Choose effects that will contribute to the effectiveness of your selling message.

## THE ANNOUNCER

Rather than using up most of your production time on sound effects and music, I advise concentrating your time

on selecting and coaching the announcer or announcers for your spots.

The announcer is the focal point of a commercial—but he needs good direction. When you are directing a spot, keep in mind what you “heard” with your inner ear when you were writing it. Chances are, the “sound” of some commercials—the sound you expect them to have—influences the way you write them. This is not to say that a good announcer may not deliver something that sounds *better*. This is fine...*only* when it honestly, to your ears and good sense, improves the selling message.

Don't accept a delivery that delivers *less* than you had in mind when you wrote the spot.

The first step in getting the delivery you had in mind is to know your announcers. Study the voices of the studio or station announcers to see what their strong points (good voice quality? straight, sincere delivery?) and weak points (characterization?) are.

If you are able to go outside a single source, check college and community theaters. The more varied your talent supply, the further you can range with your copy. (If you have only straight announcers available, for example—announcers who simply cannot do characterizations believably—you obviously won't write spots that star a French cabdriver or an Irish policeman.)

After you've selected the right voices for the right commercials, communicate to the announcers the manner in which the copy is to be read: What is the overall tone? What is the main idea? What is to be emphasized?

If you have exceptionally talented participants, they are apt to have their own ideas about some of your spots. Depending on time limits and how much credit you give their ability, brainstorming may be good for everyone involved—and can result in fresh ideas, more interesting characterizations, and a generally good, creative session.

There is always a danger, however, in departing from your original commercial concept. You, as the copywriter, should know what sells; and you write spots to do just that:

sell. Depart too far, and you may have a polished, artistic spot but not an effective *selling* spot.

Reading every commercial aloud before you take it into the studio will help uncover many defects. Hearing it read by a professional reader will help you discover more. Don't be afraid to change your words. But also, don't be afraid to stick with what your judgment tells you is right. You will develop good commercial judgment by being harder on yourself than any other critic. Listen to each new commercial objectively (both for production and content) before you approve it. Don't fall in love with your own writing.

### **TALENT FEES**

Payment of talent fees is a matter which tends to shift from city to city. Large cities have unions which regulate the fees; and if the station or studio with which you are working has a union agreement, you will of course be guided by whatever contract arrangements have been made.

Many cities, though, still have a talent scale that operates on a "whatever the traffic will bear" basis. Announcers may be required to do all the talent for their station on a salary. If their voices are used on other stations, the fee may be stipulated by their station or open to negotiation. It may range from \$5 to \$50 and up...per commercial or per station.

As a writer, you may not be directly concerned with talent fees. But because you will want to insist on using the best available, you'll want to know the facts. With some knowledge of the situation, you can best discuss talent matters with clients or station or agency personnel. Find out the facts on talent payment in your area.

### **JINGLES**

Like sound effects and music, jingles are helpful in a commercial only when they further the client's message.

Many jingles are written by nonadvertising men. Or advertising men try to write jingles when they know little or nothing about music. In either case, we sometimes hear

words committed to music that should not even be spoken. Many of those platitudes and clichés that a good ad man would rule out of his speaking vocabulary are poured into the jingles he writes.

For this reason, if you do not work with a professional jingle-writer—who knows good advertising and good music—a short jingle is your safest bet, if you need a jingle at all. Since a jingle's main purpose is to serve as a memory device, you need something that impresses the client's name—quickly—in the mind of the listener.

Professional jingle houses of varying quality sell their wares around the country. Some of them do superior work at fees ranging upwards of \$1000. Cheap jingles usually sound cheap. Because a jingle is, after all, music, it is competing for acceptance with the expensively produced popular music on the air. It must sound at least as professional.

Good jingles can and have been produced at low cost. But there are a lot of ifs connected with doing this: *If* you have a talented writer/composer. *If* you have talented singers. *If* you have good musicians. *If* you have adequate recording facilities. *If* you know WHAT WORDS the jingle should be made of. Yes, you *can* produce good jingles for your client...*If*.

I have heard a good jingle done by a local barbershop quartet using *no* instrumental backing. I produced a successful jingle using one girl harmonizing with herself via multitrack taping. Other production possibilities: a local rhythm and blues, jazz, western, folk, or rock 'n' roll group.

If the jingle fits the client and the market—and if it ends up with a good sound, fine. But in every case, ask yourself this final question: *Does the jingle do the selling job better than the copy alone?*

## EXERCISES

1. Find a good sound effect library. As you listen, make mental notes about sounds that you could use in commercials.

2. Write a commercial for a luxury motel chain. The motels have cocktail lounges, supper clubs, and swimming pools. Select a piece of music to enhance your commercial.
3. Do you find certain radio or TV commercial jingles running through your head? Which ones? Why? Have they influenced you to buy the products they advertise?

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## The Video Side of the Picture

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What does television have that no other advertising medium has? Movement.

A TV commercial without movement might just as well run on radio at 10% of the cost. A client paying for television pays for pictures, demonstrations, and for movement. He doesn't pay for a picture of an announcer talking about his product. He pays to have the *benefits* of his product *demonstrated*. The rule for TV copywriters is this: Demonstrate benefits!

For instance, if you're selling panel heaters, what can you do to produce movement to demonstrate the benefits of your client's brand? The heaters don't move. But, people can move around the heaters. In a home, a baby might be crawling toward the heater. *Show* this happening...while an off-camera announcer says:

Some child will get badly burned on a home heater this year. Don't let it be your son or daughter who's hurt! Buy clean, safe Panelray Heaters from Central Heating now.

Show the child touching the heater, laughing. Show the mother entering the picture. She picks up the baby gaily, then swings toward background draperies—another benefit about to be pointed out by the announcer:

Indoor heating often creates extra grimy dirt for you to scrub away—but not panel heat. Panel heat keeps you warm, your children safe, your draperies clean.

It would be easy to station an announcer in front of a model of the heater and let him talk for a minute about the heater's many advantages. This would promptly produce visual boredom. Only by *demonstrating benefits* do you create customers.

The commercial described was produced on a negligible budget, using the limited facilities of a small TV station. The services of the off-camera announcer were free with the purchase of the TV spots; the mother—a clothing model—and baby were available for a nominal talent fee; the TV station supplied the living room props and the client sent over the panel heater.

The client got business as a result of the TV spots. Why? First, because the copywriter had discovered what *benefits* families wanted from a home heater. Then, in production, these *benefits* were *demonstrated*.

## BASIC VIDEO PRODUCTION METHODS

Here are the basic ways to classify TV commercials:

- 1) Live—Everything is done at the time of telecasting. There is no sure way to control quality this way, but the method is fast and cheap. Single-announcer, demonstration commercials are recommended for this technique.
- 2) Videotape—The same as “live” in picture quality, videotape, corresponds to radio's recorded production in that you can rehearse a commercial until you get a perfect take. Thanks to videotape, there is no longer any excuse for nondemonstrative commercials. If your actors do not talk on camera, record *sound* in advance; that way, you can concentrate on video portion of the commercial at the TV studio.
- 3) Film (voice-over)—Film can be shot anywhere: downtown, in the country, at sea, anywhere you'd like to demonstrate the client's product. You can buy films that give the effect you want from a free-lance source—or have the TV station shoot them for you. The sound track is added later as a

“voice over.” with off-camera commentary, music, and sound effects.

- 4) Film/lip sync—Film in which the characters are talking can be obtained in several ways, either as a direct sound pickup or with the sound synchronized later to the lip movement and action.
- 5) Slides—For these, you can use live or recorded audio.

There are dozens of combinations of these basic techniques. All of them, in fact, can be used in one commercial. The advantage of combining techniques is that you can achieve effects that would be too complex for a live camera alone.

For instance, one time I had a swing suspended from the ceiling of a TV studio and a painted mountain scene put in the background. Video: An actress swung back and forth in the swing until she was able to pluck a peach from a branch held in the foreground by a prop man. The first part of the audio was a prerecorded description of the client's dairy products. In the second part of the audio, the girl recommended the new flavor—fresh peach ice cream. Several slides were used to show the closeup of the dairy's name and the prices of products.

These elements were all videotaped in one smooth minute commercial we could never have done live, but which we couldn't afford to film.

There is an interesting technique which utilizes the best of film, live, videotape and slide presentation. It is done with *camera cards*—large cards on which are mounted pictures or messages. They are designed to fill the home screen when shot by the TV camera.

Good cartooning is very good for TV commercials. But when it is bad, it is too expensive, no matter how little the cost. If you're on a small budget, and the commercials need cartoons, have the cartoonist draw single-name pictures which can serve as camera cards.

You could do the panel heat commercial or similarly designed commercials entirely with camera cards. Take still pictures of each of the dramatic moments described.



Mount the pictures on camera cards and arrange the cards in two stacks: the first picture in the sequence goes in stack A, the second picture in the sequence in stack B. Each stack of camera cards is placed on an easel in front of TV cameras A and B.

Here's how part of the panel heat commercial might look in script, if the camera card technique were used:

**VIDEO**

**AUDIO**

CAMERA A: TAKE picture of baby crawling. Move in for closeup of baby picture. Pan along baby's hand to heater.

B: TAKE mother's face, move back to show her reaching for baby.

A: TAKE mother, swinging baby up into air. Move in for closeup of baby's face.

B: DISSOLVE to extreme closeup of drapes. Move back to show mother admiring them.

Some child will get badly burned on a home heater this year. Don't let it be your child who's hurt.

Buy clean, safe Panelray Heaters from Central Heating now.

Indoor heating often creates grimy dirt...but not panel heat.

■ Panel heat keeps you warm all winter. And...even your drapes stay clean.

Here are a few shorthand camera instructions that will help you indicate movement you need:

**DOLLY IN** or **DI**: Move in camera on subject.

**DOLLY OUT** or **DO**: Move camera away from subject.

**PAN**: Move camera from one side of subject to the other.

**TAKE**: Abruptly pick up subject with camera.

**DISSOLVE**: Slowly go from one camera to another.

**CU**: Closeup.

**ECU**: Extreme closeup.

**MCU**: Medium closeup.

**BUST SHOT**: Take subject from waist up.

**HEAD SHOT**: Take only head of subject.

**SUPER**: Superimpose something; e.g., a title on a slide.

**V/O**: Voice over film.

### **SUPERIMPOSED TITLES**

Superimposed titles are helpful only when they fit naturally with the action and movement of the film. By

flashing on the price, brand name, client's name or number, and other essential matter, you can compound the viewers' impressions of seeing and hearing—doubling the impact.

Superimposed titles are made with slides or camera cards; white letters are painted on a black background. When ordering *super* slides, as they are called, be sure that the lettering is toward the bottom of the slide so that it does not cover some important part of the action on the screen.

There are various ways in which to insert slides and supers into a commercial. You can order a *take* in which they suddenly appear. They can be *wiped* on from left to right, or from top to bottom. Stations are often equipped with more sophisticated equipment that allows you to change scenes and slides with *venetian blind* effects and other special effects. Get to know TV directors and learn firsthand the possibilities at each station with which you work. No matter how modest the setup, imaginative commercials can be produced—if you supply the imagination.

### **SCALE MODELS**

The toy world has created new horizons for local TV prop designing. Instead of going to the time and expense of designing full-size sets, scale-model toys can be used. These often look realistic on the screen and are, of course, far cheaper and easier to put together for a commercial session. Even the use of current-model toy cars saves the time and inconvenience of bringing in the real thing from a local car dealer.

More can be done with toys on camera. A scale-model car can be placed on a spinning turntable for instance—for a stunning special effect. Also eye-stopping; a scale-model house attacked by fake “termites”—to illustrate the complete destruction of a home for lack of proper pest control.

### **SUBTLETY: AN APPROACH TO THE CLIENT'S NAME**

Remember, when producing TV copy, as when producing radio commercials: keep it simple and to the point. Don't mistake a tricky TV effect for a good selling

idea. Demonstrate the product's benefits or the store's uniqueness, but don't let the production ideas get in the way of the benefit lines. The more subtle your approach to the client's name, visually, the more impact it will have on viewers who are used to every commercial ending with a blatant sponsor's sig. Logotypes are disappearing from the bottom of national magazine ads. Why not also from the end of the local TV commercial? Give the viewer something more intriguing.

*For a store:* Show the store's name printed on a label, price tag, or shopping bag.

*For a restaurant:* Have a man light a girl's cigarette, with a closeup of the matchbook that has the client's name printed on it.

*For a car dealer:* Have a car drive away from a camera closeup of the dealer's nameplate on the car's trunk.

Consider the following example; its subtlety might make a viewer think a TV show, not a commercial, was beginning:

VIDEO	AUDIO
TAKE gulls circling lazily in sky.	(SOUND OF POUNDING WAVES) (SOUND OF GULLS)
TILT down slowly to show island in background. water in foreground.	Who can forget the mythical magic once experienced when reading Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island"? Even today, you feel the sharp sting of the spray as it pounds the shore. Listen, and the ghost of Long John Silver hobbles by, his wooden leg tapping toward the buried chest of gold...
TAKE waves slapping rocky inlet.	(UP FAST MUSIC)
PAN to show beach.	This is your rare inheritance when you select a homesite on the <i>real</i> Treasure Island. Situated on the waters of Lake McQueeney, Treasure Island is the nation's outstanding holiday-retirement area. Your homesite will front either the breathtaking lake or a wide stream.
TAKE quick montage of "Treasure Island" sign, homes, people on beach, boats, water skiing.	

## Video

Boat pulls into slip by home. Couple comes from house to meet boaters.

TAKE treasure-style map, with directions. Take picture of pirate pointing. FOLLOW direction of finger to sign. "Treasure Island."

## Audio

You'll have your own boat slip. New homes begin at \$20,000, including homesite.

To see Treasure Island, take the Beltway to Lake McQueeny. Follow the signs of the pirate to *Treasure Island...YOUR* Treasure Island, for lifetimes of treasured moments.

Although this commercial is indicated as a film-type, it could be done at greatly reduced cost with camera cards, as described earlier.

## EXERCISES

1. Do you have a folder of commercials you've written from exercises that earlier chapters in this book have suggested? Write your five favorite ones for TV. (I say "write" not "rewrite" because you will have to change your format entirely—to include *movement* and *demonstrate benefits*.)
2. Write a television commercial for:
  - a drug store that wants to emphasize the speedy service customers get;
  - a camera with a wide-angle lens, for a local shop; the 2nd National Bank, at its new, convenient suburban location;
  - El Caffo coffee; (Note: Left over from a series of appliance commercials that have just been shot is a completely equipped kitchen. The station manager wants to know if you want to use it for the coffee commercials. Do you? Or do you want to try something different?)
  - a local car dealer that sells four lines of cars.
3. Do the commercials you've just written have movement? Do they demonstrate benefits? Do they demonstrate the RIGHT benefits? If you're not sure, discover a *different* set of benefits—and compare the commercials that result with the first set you wrote.

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## 19

# What Is a Commercial?

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A commercial is a group of sounds and words (and, on television, pictures) that attempts to sell something to somebody.

It has to compete with the thousands of other advertising impressions that assault us daily. It has to contend with the fact that 85% of all advertising is ignored (according to a Harvard Business School survey). Of the 15% that people pay attention to, some is found offensive and is even damaging to the advertiser.

How, then, do you write a commercial that falls into the elite ranks of advertising that fulfills its mission: to sell something to somebody?

You begin by considering customer motivation. Psychologists tell us that we don't buy things for the things themselves, but rather to obtain security, status, self-esteem, or other components of happiness. That's why it's important to feature and demonstrate how the customer will benefit from what a product, service, or selling event can offer.

To get and hold interest, tell something new. Don't merely give a dull statement of the benefits as facts. Present it in a new way, with a new twist. Benson and Hedges wasn't first with hundred-millimeter cigarettes, but their commercials made them seem like the newest idea in smoking—in a clever class by themselves. The

commercials gained attention and interest by presenting *disadvantages*, not advantages, but in a subtle tongue-in-cheek way. By doing so, they allowed the smoker to make up his own list of advantages. (Number one on this list: he would be associating himself with the wry, diffident people in these commercials.) In today's overcrowded market, a commercial should do more than try to sell something to somebody. It should invite the viewer or listener to *participate*. It should be *involving* to the point where the viewer or listener provides or realizes his own product benefits: he sells himself (at least, this is the ideal).

Writers of advertising have been told time and again to appeal to the customer's emotions. As a result, we see everything from soup to nuts-and-bolts sold on the premise that they will make someone love us. The problem is, the public has more than a one-track emotion. Emotional needs for fun, self-esteem, achievement, and zest for a new experience have been unexplored. Benson & Hedges appealed to the area of humor, and—because we got the benefits without being hit over the head with them—of self-esteem and pride.

### GETTING DOWN TO THE ESSENTIALS

As we said at the beginning of this chapter, a commercial is words and pictures. You have about 150 words in a one-minute commercial, but if you can tell the story in 125, so much the better. Figure no more than 25 words per ten seconds of time on the air. Count every word, including every number in a price, phone number, etc. And try to keep a retailer's address and phone number minimal. Explain to your client that most phone numbers and complicated addresses are not remembered. The purpose of a commercial is to sell the *idea* of the store, or sale, or whatever. If the commercial does its job, people will be willing to look the store up in the classified section of the phone book. If some location is desirable, or insisted on, suggest a simple version: as, "Main Street and Fifth."

Getting along with clients, salesmen, and yourself is three-fourths of the job of copywriting. You cannot always

do things the right way, because there is not always a "right" way to write copy. Just write the best way you know how; then rewrite until you are really satisfied. Get down to the essentials. Cut excess words, without mercy; chances are they will get in the way of the message. When you have done this—and are really sure about it—know why your commercial is good. And be prepared to defend it. If the client insists on changes (and he is paying for the commercial, after all), be sure *he* knows why the commercial was written as it was before you give in. Even if you lose a few decisions, you will build a reputation of knowing what you are talking about.

### PREPARING COPY

Write so there can be no possible mistake on meaning or pronunciation. (If there can be a mistake, there *will* be one.) Spell out every word. Indicate at the top of every commercial the correct pronunciation of unusual or difficult words, trade names, and especially the CLIENT'S name if it is anything other than Jones, Smith, or Brown.

Hyphenate all word groups that need hyphenation. Underline words that need extra stress, either for intensification or for sentence meaning. Don't divide words at the end of a line.

Generally, write numbers as numerals. The exception is any sentence which has more than one number, e.g., buy two 5-pound bags of flour for 39 cents.

The hyphen as used above also helps to make the sentence clear. And, with any amount of money under a dollar, write 39 cents or 39¢—not \$.39.

When you have checked everything in the copy, type it on durable white paper, using upper *and* lower case letters. This is the way everybody learns to read; it is the style of most reading we encounter; and it is the easiest style from which to read aloud. It's just not true that radio and TV announcers read ALL-CAPS BETTER, ALTHOUGH IF THEY *INSIST* THEY DO—WELL, YOU DO HAVE TO DEAL WITH THEM, SO TYPE ALL-CAPS. Suggest they try reading copy that uses upper and lower case, though.

And try to avoid having to use a typewriter with elite or smaller types.

### **DOES IT SELL?**

There was once a salesman who couldn't spell. His colleagues chuckled over his memos to the home office; they typically read:

Soled three hunnert mor ourders today.  
Please send mor at wonce.

The chuckling continued among the other salesmen (who could all write like college graduates), until a memo came from the president of the firm, who had been seeing, lately, a sagging sales curve. The memo read:

I want all you guys to do les spellin and mor sellin.

The rules in this book are like spelling rules. It's valuable to know them. They help you get your message across quickly and precisely. But I'm sure that any rule in the book *could* be broken effectively.

The guides in this book are important not as "rules" but because they are based on how people react to advertising. The business of advertising is *selling*; and all techniques illustrated here have helped *sell*. Ask of any technique, before you use it: *DOES IT SELL?*



