



What's the Secret to Writing Effective Radio Announcements?

Compel Your Audience To Listen

Does it entertain? Probably. Does it give you information that you need? Possibly. Does it make you remember your own experiences? Maybe. Does it make you want to do something? Very likely. Every good radio experience does one or more of these things.



Empower The Listener

Effective radio announcements are the ones that empower the listener. They give the listener the right to take responsibility. They validate the listener's decision to take action. In other words, they send a message to the listener that says, "You have the right, the duty, and the responsibility to take charge of the situation and do something about it."

A good example is the anti-drunk driving campaign. The original campaign focused on why people shouldn't drink and drive. It showed twisted automobiles at crash scenes, ambulances, police, dark rain-slicked streets, flashing lights and sirens. The campaign didn't work. Driving Under the Influence arrests continued to rise. They revamped the campaign strategy by taking responsibility away from the driver and giving it to the passengers. The result was the "Good Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk" campaign. It worked. What the radio announcements did was empower us. It gave us the right to take the keys away from friends who've had too much to drink. And, it not only gave us the right to save their lives, it also made us responsible for our friends' actions. It did this -- not by preaching to us, but by showing us the painful process people go through when deciding whether or not to intervene in their friends' lives. What the campaign showed was that we should not focus on the negative, but on the positive.

Make Every Word Count

Thirty seconds can be a long time (like when you're late and stuck at a traffic light, or when the dentist has a drill inserted in your mouth, or when you're about to give a speech), but not when you're trying to persuade someone to do something for you.

First, identify a "hook". A hook is something that will grab the listener's attention. How are you going to keep a teen from changing the channel or letting their attention drift when your message comes on? A hook can be something funny, catchy music, a shocking statistic or emotional appeal.

Second, get rid of certain words. Whenever possible, remove the word "that." Go through your copy and you'll find that most of your "thats" are unnecessary.

Third, take out as many prepositional phrases as possible. That will tighten up your writing considerably. Instead of saying "Pat Jones, president of the Humane Society of Clarksville," say "Clarksville Humane Society President Pat Jones".

Try To Find The Perfect Word - Don't Become Obsessed About It

Be careful. The perfect word must be understandable by the most listeners. Don't use a word like "egregious" when a more common synonym will do (such as: "deplorable," "flagrant," "glaring," "infamous," "notorious," or "outrageous").

Talk To Your Audience, Not At Them

Stick to one idea. Focus on one main persuasive message. Otherwise, you'll confuse the listener.

Use Humor Sparingly

You won't often find the perfect humor that will influence opinion and spark behavior favorable to your organization or cause. Improperly used, humor can appear cruel and insensitive and can ruin a campaign.

Play With Emotions

Appeal to the listener's five basic needs (shelter, food, clothing, appreciation or love, and vanity) to evoke a gut-wrenching reaction, or you can appeal to their wants, which are unlimited. Generally speaking, if you want something, chances are others will want it, too. Use your intuition; you may be surprised at how universal your wants are. Select a persuasive appeal. Here are 11 basic psychological appeals: sensory, appetite, security (feeling safe), acquiring something, well-being, attractiveness, threat, humor, convenience, curiosity and ego. Just make sure your appeals are honestly based.

Call For Action

Finally, don't forget the call to action. It's a sales technique. If you don't ask for help -- specific help -- people won't be obliged, they won't feel empowered to do something for you. Remember, the whole purpose of the radio announcement is to elicit a specific behavioral action. There should be something -- a particular action -- that you want the listener to do. This is the payoff, so don't forget to ask them: Send in your donation, contact your congressman, join us in our walk for the homeless, come to the town hall meeting, vote for Proposition 3 on the November ballot, get your free blood-pressure check, buy a ticket to the fish fry.

Check Your Facts

It's very important for the facts in your message to be accurate. Any facts should be checked before sending in your entry. You can use the "Facts About Driving Risks" posted on the NYS Association of Traffic Safety Boards' website (www.nysatsb.com) and/or visit other trustworthy websites on traffic safety, such as, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (www.nhtsa.dot.gov) and the New York State Governor's Traffic Safety Committee (www.safeny.com).