

How to Sell a Spec Spot

Part One:

The Causes of Spec Spot Reluctance

Many of the sales departments that I consult complain of an apparent reluctance on the part of writers and/or producers to enthusiastically embrace spec spots. As spec spots are the one of the most important tools in de-commoditizing our product, it is important that you understand the cause of this reluctance, and take steps to pre-empt it.

While the avoidance of your spec spot creation is usually blamed upon "lack of time" or being "too busy", here are the three most common *actual* causes of spec spot reluctance on the part of your writers/producers

1. **SILENCE!** Your lack of communication regarding your appreciation of, or the results from, a speculative commercial presentation is the single most critical factor in fostering a disgruntled attitude towards creating spec spots.

When your writers or producers take the time to create what they think is just the right approach to close more business for the station, they assume THEY failed when you don't make the sale or the campaign does not get to air.

Often when they hear nothing about the results of their efforts they assume the client never even heard the campaign....and I'm sad to say that sometimes that is actually the case!

2. **Insufficient information.** Try giving your spec spot information to one of your peers and see if they think they have enough information to write a campaign. Most of the time there just isn't enough information.
3. **Insufficient effort.** Often sales people do not present or defend the speculative creative approach, and take "no" for an answer in favor of coming back with yet another spec spot.

Part Two:

Achieving Spec Spot Buy-In

Here are eight steps you can take towards fostering a better relationship with your creative team, and towards having better spec spot results.

1. ***Pre-qualify every account*** rather than relying on a spec spot to work magic in an impossible situation.
2. ***Keep your creative people in the loop***. If a spot doesn't sell, get back to them and tell them why.
3. ***Give your creative people as much information*** as you possibly can about the prospect's competitive position, image and long term aspirations.
4. ***Give the creative department some intellectual freedom...***don't hand-cuff them with sixties or thirties, and talk to them in terms of *strategy*, not tactics or "your idea".
5. ***When you get the spot***, have a conversation to discuss the writer's and/or the producer's strategic thinking that went into the campaign. And say "thanks"!
6. ***Sell, sell, sell!*** If you believe the idea is the right approach for a client, present it in the light it deserves, and don't let the client's personal taste interfere with the strategic correctness of the idea.
7. ***If it doesn't sell, let the creative people know why***. Explain the steps you took to sell it, and discuss the next steps in creating a campaign which will be successful.
8. Last but not least, ***prove to your people that their efforts were not in vain***. Discuss what other clients might have similar objectives and tweak the campaign to fit them until someone DOES buy it.

P.S. A little financial incentive or recognition for every spec-spot sold can also go a long way.

Part Three:

Selling the Selling Message

Spec spots should be the key focal point of every major presentation.

Spec spots take the focus off of rates and ratings, and puts it where it should be....on creating messages which produce results and top of mind awareness for our clients.

Some of your people, however, might not know HOW to present a spec spot. In a presentation I observed recently, the rep I was with played one spot one time for the client, then asked with a grin "How do you like it?"

"Liking it" is not what is at stake here! What is at stake is the image or impression you and the client agreed needed to be created. Is it relevant to the target audience, not the client? And does it help the client reach their goals?

So here are seven steps to presenting spec commercials more effectively.

- Tip #1** Present more spec commercials more often.
- Tip #2** Set the scene with a written creative strategy. Remind the prospect of the objectives and goals you uncovered during the discovery process with them *before* you play the spec spots.
- Tip #3** Then ask them to listen to your campaign, NOT with a view to whether they, "like it" or not, but with the perspective of how your target audience would perceive the client. Does the commercial create an image and identity that is relevant, unique and sustainable over time?
- Tip #4** Give the client or prospect a copy of the script to follow along as they listen.
- Tip #5** Ask them to listen a minimum of two to three times before making comments or changes....after all, don't we tell them your audience has to be exposed to the message that many times before it sinks in?
- Tip #6** Present "campaigns", rather than "spots", complete with seasonal or opportunistic variations on your main theme.
- Tip #7** Refer to Tip # 1.

P.S. Always test fly your specs before you land in front of a client only to be embarrassed by an error or a technical difficulty.

Part Four:

The Companion "Spec"

Lately there has been much written in the trades and in various newsletters about the importance of spec creative. But I haven't seen or heard much about the other "spec".....spec calendars.

One of the reasons spec commercials are so important is that clients need to see and hear what they are buying and what they are saying.

In my seminar, Making Radio Tangible, I demonstrate that the same holds true for spec calendars. Many clients can't envision what they would do or say if they did invest in a 52-week schedule. Often when we say "consistency" or "long term" they believe we are only trying to sell them on a long term bill or consistent invoice.

The spec calendar gives them week-by-week sample objectives for their creative. A car dealer, for example, can't imagine what she might be saying in her commercials next June. When you outline back-to-back strategic objectives for her, she has the opportunity to revise or agree to the campaigns you are proposing.

- Here is a partial sample spec calendar for a car dealer:

Date	Objective	Strategy
Week 1 & 2	Sell More Trucks	A Truck Event
Week 3 & 4	Staff Morale/Promote Service	Praise Service Manager's Awards
Week 5	Highlight Used Cars	Promote Used Car Warranty
Week 6 & 7	Promote Body Shop	Interview body shop manager about importance of OEM parts
Week 8	Recruiting	Highlight the kind of people customers can expect

Even though the weekly themes you propose in your spec calendar take time to develop, getting agreement in principal on each of the strategic objectives will help make what you are selling more tangible as clients see the merit in each of the objectives you propose.

Asking someone to commit to selling more trucks next February is much easier than asking them to book more spots for next February.

By weighting the various objectives to align with the client's various profit centers and objectives you will also clearly exhibit your knowledge of the customer's business.

Laying out a spec calendar also gives your creative team the opportunity to think ahead and develop the basic creative idea for each campaign well in advance. While the actual prices and items may not be pre-determined, having time to develop the theme or idea is a huge advantage.

Like spec commercials, seldom will your spec calendar remain in tact as proposed.

Getting agreement on the various strategic objectives allows you to build strong brand-building ideas into the plan for the client, rather than always being dependant upon special events or sales for creative.

Try the ENS Media 52-week spec calendar. You'll find it a strong companion to your spec spots when asking for a 52-week commitment.