

## **SOME CONSIDERATIONS IN PRODUCING TV AND RADIO SPOTS**

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Nearly every wildlife agency has at some time produced public service material for radio and television. Of the 16 Southeastern states, 10 indicated that they produced such materials on a regular basis. We, in Virginia, have produced all types from scripts with slides and home brewed narrations up to prize winning productions with custom composed music.

Public service messages can benefit your agency in several ways. First, they communicate via popular communication mediums to a public already tuned in. Almost everyone watches TV and listens to some radio, though not all will admit it. When you get some good spots that average 5 or 6 plays daily on major TV stations, as some of ours recently did, nearly everyone you talk to will mention having seen them. Second, spots reach an audience that we don't always reach with messages delivered in other ways, and the exposure is good for the agency's image if the spots are well done. It lets the general state taxpayer know his wildlife agency is alive and well. He might never read the agency magazine or the sports pages and we seldom hit the front page with anything that helps build the agency's image.

Third, the radio and television media are persuasive communicators, drilling your message into the heads of those who need it. Just as visual images of hammers pounding on heads sell aspirin, 5 or 6 boating safety messages daily sell boating safety principles. Following a highly successful summer boating safety campaign on TV, which must have received 3000 individual airings across the state, the Coast Guard Auxiliary reports a record number of inquiries and registrants for their boating safety courses. People must have gotten the message.

The selection of subject matter will reflect agency priorities and problems. We have found that safety is a subject that really turns broadcasters on. They get safety messages from many sources, but our agency almost has a monopoly on those involving hunting and boating. A local touch is always appreciated so ours usually get more air time than those from the Coast Guard or U. S. Power Squadron Headquarters.

Since we have had such enthusiastic response to messages revolving around safety, we have done more in this area than elsewhere. Safety is like apple pie and motherhood. Anti-hunters and other preservationists can't very well criticize you for such messages. From such a base you can throw in a little ethics and a bit about regulations while still clinging to the central theme of safety. We think this approach pays the biggest dividends but not all situations could be fitted to this format. In addition to turning on broadcasters, having your agency identified strongly with safety develops a positive attitude among the state's non-sportsmen. Some state agencies that are not involved with either hunting or boating safety would have to choose another route.

We have done spots defending hunting, condemning pesticides, bemoaning habitat loss and giving true facts about endangered species. Although they were some of our best, they never received a fraction of the air time devoted to our safety productions.

In addition to the subject matter involved, when using radio and television there are additional dimensions of sounds and visual images that can speak more strongly than words. Your message might be, "Give us more money to buy wildlife areas, you tightwads", but if accompanied with images of ferns, misty mornings and butterflies, it comes across quite differently.

In TV spot productions we concentrate on beauty first with enough explicit pictures to make the point. In hunting spots use attractive clothes, expensive guns, great looking dogs and plenty of colorful autumn leaves. For boating productions use sailboats and blue sky, canoes and white water, pretty girls and colorful accessories.

Radio is a little more difficult in that you need an audio gimmick to bring your production to life. This can be sound effects like honking geese, beautiful or clever music or a clever twist to your copy such as used in most current day commercials. Here again, anything that will mesmerize your audience while you sock 'em with the message is great. Emotions are what we want to stir, so be emotional. Humor can be effective, but it had better be good. Current commercials get away with a lot of corn, but I doubt if it

would do much for our agencies' images, let alone our bosses' opinion of our work.

While upholding the dignity of the Commonwealth we try to make our messages simple, catchy, and when possible, clever. Of these, simple is most important. Make only 1 or 2 points per spot when possible. Sixty second versions allow more room for copy, but filling them full can create a bomb instead of a big hit.

We try to set a mood and give enough background to make 1 or 2 points. You have to generalize, which isn't always easy. Words, as well as other audio and visual effects, should help set the mood. Thirty or 60 sec. of preaching isn't very effective.

The anticipated audience should be determined before copy is prepared and production planned. We try to keep some general appeal in all our productions but most are aimed strongly at a specific segment of the population. If nothing else, the subject matter to some extent restricts the audience to which it will appeal. Situations portrayed tend to appeal to persons who can identify with them, even if only vicariously. Messages for young people should take their interests and tastes into account. We haven't done an acid rock yet, but I don't rule out the possibility. Country music has strong appeal to rural people and rural stations. All these aspects must be considered in developing the final package.

And now that we have decided what should be done, it is time to unite our balloon with the other half of the formula, the budget, which usually takes the form of a pin. Price doesn't totally affect quality, but it does greatly influence technique and limit possibilities. Very basic is the duplication charge for producing the required number of copies. Our costs run about \$3.00 each for packaged radio tape, of which we need 150. Video tapes run about \$30.00-\$40.00 each, while films cost \$12.00-\$50.00, depending on the number of spots, and we require 20 copies for distribution. Deduct this amount and then you know how much you have for production.

Production can be in-house and therefore cost very little, but few have a Woody Bledsoe or a Paul Ott to call on, let alone the camera equipment, recorders, audio mixers, editing equipment, etc. necessary to complete the project. In these cases, an outside contractor should be considered for all or part of the package.

Our most critical area seems to be finding the personnel time to develop a public service package from start to finish in any reasonable time frame. Our people are making movies, writing press releases, putting together the magazine and such projects as public service spots always seemed to stay in the planning stages waiting for us to get the time to complete them. When we did produce one it was usually late and therefore ineffective.

We decided to employ a private contractor and have been using outside (and inside) talent on our spots ever since. We still plan to do some ourselves if we ever get around to it. In the meantime we have turned out 33 radio spots and 19 TV spots using private contractors, mostly ad agencies. I consider these jobs we would never have done with our existing staff. Therefore, it is like having part of an extra person on your staff when you need him for such projects.

Actually, agencies are better than one additional staff member since they have several persons to cooperatively put together your copy, plan your production and carry it out. That's probably more experts than on your whole staff. They are specialists in delivering 30 second messages, something most of us are not. They are hep to the latest fads and fancies of the public, the latest styles of presentations, and the state of the art in production. They have the arrangements with studios, photographers, and even the media if you need these contacts for distribution. You can usually contract for as little or as much as you like.

Typically we compile a list of points we want to communicate and decide on a maximum budget. We then meet with the agency representatives to discuss alternatives of production style open to us. After agreeing on a basic concept and format we turn over the points and supporting data such as publications, statistics, regulations, etc. to the contractor whose staff then prepares a rough draft of the copy. A brief meeting is scheduled to review and change the draft and approve additional production plans. This often stretches to 2 or 3 more meetings depending on changes. After final copy approval a rough mix is sometimes made for review before final production. We have made changes all along the way including on the final tape or film so we have very tight

control. Staff time averages about 3 to 4 hours on a typical production with 2 persons involved part of that time. A few days later the finished prints are delivered boxed for mailing.

How about the cost? It has varied from \$50.00 for a professional announcer to cut a straight audio track to \$1,500 each for spots involving custom written music, an orchestra, sound effects, etc. Radio spots average about \$200.00 each with background music, sound effects and 150 prints. TV spots we have done for \$300.00 each with us providing raw film, twice that or more if custom shot. From here you can go to animation, puppets, actors, rental of special equipment like helicopters, and on and on. In the business, \$20,000 and up is not uncommon. An alternative that has been suggested to us, but one we haven't tried, is to contract with local TV stations for production. Station representatives claim their services are cheaper than those of agencies yet they can offer experts in TV commercial production. One fringe benefit is that the participating station is almost obligated to give the spot extensive play to make themselves look good. Another possibility is your state college system.

Timing can be very important for maximum exposure. Stations seem to have an advertising drought in late summer and early fall. PSA's will receive proportionally more play if available at this time. Likewise hunting spots should be distributed by early September to catch the tail end of this period. The commercial world seems to revolve around Christmas so don't expect much from spots which hit the stations at this time. In most cases it takes at least 2 weeks from the time a PSA is received until it appears on the air. Keep this in mind when sending advance spots on National Hunting and Fishing Day, Safe Boating Week, season openings, etc.

We have become firm believers that you can almost multiply potential airings by the number of spots in the package. We have most recently produced TV spots in series of 8. This reduces the production cost per spot since several can be shot at one location. Duplicating and distribution costs aren't much higher than for a single spot except when using film, and even here there is economy over individual prints. Broadcasters seem to appreciate the variety since they schedule the spots in sequence to avoid constant duplication. The frequency with which these appeared would have been objectionable to viewers if they were all the same. A slight increase in budget for a variety instead of one is a good investment if you can afford it.

Length can also influence use. We have had the best success with 30 second spots. They seem to fit in more slots and neither broadcasters nor viewers tire of them as quickly. If you could get two 30 sec. spots for the price of one 60 sec. spot, it would be a great buy, but things don't work out that way. Even so, 30 sec. spots are a little cheaper.

All in all, we have received more awards, more praise, and more recognition from our own people and associates for our public service spots than for most things we do. We are convinced the agency has gained positive recognition from the public as a result. At least some of the messages seem to have widely motivated the public. Broadcasters have been increasingly generous in giving our material air time, presumably because they like our work. For the \$3,000 to \$5,000 per year we spend on spots, we think they pay big dividends. By utilizing private contractors we don't have to push aside our day to day work to produce quality public service announcements. The agency's staff complements and extends the expertise we can furnish through our own staff. Services we provide, such as actors or a film crew, reduce the cost when practical. The contractor provides concept and execution, including copy writing narration, music, editing production and packaging.