
ADVERTS & SPOTS

The Short Spot or Commercial is a very powerful way of making a simple point in a short time.

Manufacturers and retailers will pay a great deal of money for a short advertisement on radio. They are convinced of the power of the short spot to affect the lives of listeners. We should consider this format carefully, as a powerful potential means of communicating Christian truth.

To be powerful it must be well made. We will consider some simple guide-lines to making effective short spots. First of all however we must define our terms. We are talking here of a short pre-recorded item, generally either 30 seconds or a minute in length. These items can be used in all sorts of locations, during sequences, at programme junctions, and during commercial breaks.

WHAT TO SAY AND WHO TO SAY IT TO

As always, the Audience comes first. We must tailor the programme to the audience that we have in mind. We will want to consider their age, social background, and, if the item is to communicate Christian Truth, then their point of view on Christianity. We will need to know what is of interest to that audience, what sort of things will make them sit up and listen. With a short spot we must grab their attention immediately.

Again, as always we must be very clear about our aim. Making adverts & spots forces us to be think clearly about this. In the few seconds available we cannot say more than one thing, and if our aim is not clear, it is all too evident in the finished product. The aim must not only be clear it must also be simple.

ONE AIM - FOUR QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

A short spot can really only say one thing clearly. All advertisers know this. They will aim to be very clear about these four issues:

- **WHO is it for - be very specific**
- **WHAT the Product or Service is - keep it simple**
- **WHY it is worth buying or using - "the offer" - make it convincing**
- **HOW the listener can get it**

For the advertiser all these are essential. However it is possible to assume some points as understood. Some advertisements have deliberately only hinted at their well known brand name. This in itself communicates something about the product's popularity. The How question can also be left as understood in some cases.

It is the Why question above that it is essential to answer simply. This will mean giving some considerable thought to what needs to be communicated. Take for example an advertisement for a bank. Here are a selection of answers to the question: Why this bank?

- Because it gives good interest rates
- Because it has many branches
- Because it allows you to get your money easily
- Because your money will be kept safely
- Because the bank cares for the individual
- Because it offers many different services
- Because it is keeping up with the times
- Because sensible (or wise) people use this bank

A good advertisement will focus on only one of these points, probably emphasizing its strengths in order to contrast well with the competition.

When communicating Christian Truth we have a great deal to say -- more than we probably realize. We must be careful to select and say one clear thing if we are to use the short spot well. And beware of Christian jargon and clichés. They often hide a great deal of information that the non-Christian will not understand. We may also need to make sure all four issues are covered (Who, What, Why and How).

HOW TO SAY IT

Once we know what we are to say and to whom, then the difficult part begins. And the short spot is such a creative medium that we can only give a few guide-lines.

- **DIFFERENT**

No two spots need be alike. There may be a limitation on time available, but there is no limit to the variety of techniques, formats and styles that can be used in producing a short spot. It can be serious or funny, dramatic or musical. Humour can work extremely well in spots, as long as the subject suits such a treatment. Different recording techniques can be used too. Try Vox Pops, Telephone voices, Location Recordings, or simply unusual use of EQ or special effects.

- **ATTENTION GRABBING**

The first few seconds need to grab the listener's attention. It is a fact that many listeners mentally switch off during advertisements, so only a really catchy short spot can hope to grab their attention.

- **WELL WRITTEN**

For the short spot it is well worth investing a great deal of time in getting a script that really works, avoiding clichés or wordy phrases.

- **WELL PRESENTED**

The advertising world employs actors and specialist "voice talent" to voice commercials, and it can be worthwhile taking time to find the right voice. The listener may well hear a short spot several times, and it needs to be right in every way. Actors can add meaning and character to a piece that might otherwise sound dull and boring. Actors are also good at being produced. They are practised at accepting advice and correction regarding their presentation.

Good presentation is however not the same as the somewhat pushy selling style of some adverts.

*? If you need a pushy selling type voice, then your material
(or your message) is probably not good enough.*

- **GOOD RADIO**

Short spots will need to make full use of the medium if they are to succeed. This means that one great advantage is the ability of radio to make pictures. One famous example quoted in Robert McLeish's book *The Technique of Radio Production* is a commercial which advertises yellow paint, by describing how vivid the yellow colour is. (3rd Ed. Page 118)

Remember too that radio is musical and imaginative. You can tell stories, write songs..... If it works on radio, then it could make a good short spot.

- **MEMORABLE**

There are many well known examples of advertisements that have become famous. All good short spots will be memorable. The listener may remember the whole script of a good spot. This is one of the great strengths of such a short item.

PLAYING ADS & SPOTS

Once made, the spot or advert must then be played in the most effective way. If it is an advert it will probably be grouped with other adverts. If a Religious spot it may stand alone, or with other commercial adverts. Stations will give great care to the time at which spots

and adverts are aired – aiming to maximise the audience size and impact. Most program clocks will show ad breaks close to the times at which the audience is known to be building – for example near news, or travel information.

OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR

One important factor in using spots is that of repetition. Items like this often rely on repetition to get the point home. A measure of this repetition is called "opportunity to hear", and is simply what it says - a count of the number of opportunities that the listener has to hear the spot.

To increase the "OTH" the spot can just be repeated, but sometimes it is preferable not to repeat the whole item. A shorter "reminder" spot could be used. This has the added advantage that if time is being paid for (as with all advertising), that the OTH can be increased without simply multiplying the rate for a full spot.

An accepted advertising industry "entry level" for is 3 OTH. Obviously, the higher the OTH the better.

PLACING

Where a spot is played will also be a factor in considering its effectiveness. Generally advertisers want to be heard at times when there is a peak in audience figures. Advert breaks are commonly placed so that they capture rising audiences. On a station that carries news on the hour, this will be just before and after the news.