

# MEDIA STRATEGY

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## Common media sense

### Sometimes it means ignoring your personal taste

*By Gene Willhoft*

There are lots of ideas for improving the way we think about buying and planning media, some of them just plain common sense. However, it's been my experience that there really is no such thing as a sense common to everyone, in general or in the media business. It is in this spirit that I offer the following suggestions.

**1) Don't rely on 800-numbers to aid the media selection process.** Be careful of relying too much on 800-number response data-particularly with respect to magazines. Inferences can be made, but not recommendations. Why? For our client Range Rover, we strongly suspect magazine response was, in a few instances, manipulated by shrewd salespeople; Specifically, our weekly analysis of 800- number response, by magazine, curiously showed extremely high response to a number of publications weeks and months after they were removed from the plan. We believe over zealous sales-people, in the hope of getting their magazine reinstated on the plan, were repeatedly calling and giving their magazine as the source. Clearly this practice can skew results greatly and will mislead those who take it at face value. I don't believe this occurs all that much, especially in network or spot television. On the other hand, it may be more common. That's why this type of feedback should be taken with a grain of salt.

**2) Resist making media decisions based on your personal taste.** Your likes and dislikes, I believe, should have very little to do with the media selection process, particularly for magazines. Publications should be judged based on their circulation and audience quality, to name but a few criteria. Perhaps the Entertainment Weekly situation comes to mind. Sure, there was a lot of criticism of the book when it was first published. Much of this criticism centered around the personal tastes of media decision-makers (particularly from an art direction stand-point). This is exactly what I believe we should stay away from. Sure, if you're talking about a new publication that really has no established audience or circulation information, you have

to go on gut-there's nothing else. However, I believe Entertainment Weekly was under the microscope because of the Time Inc. factor and suffered greatly for it. I don't hear people complaining about Spy's art direction, which in my view is much harder to read than EW ever was. For every media person that likes a book, there's someone who doesn't like it. And, if selection sometimes hinges upon personal taste, all professional criteria evaporate, making the professional's opinion equal to the layman's. Dig to find the objective truth; don't take the easy way out. Television buying, particularly during the upfront primetime market, is another story entirely. Often there isn't much to go on besides personal taste. However, keep in mind that even ex-pert programmers and buyers frequently miss the mark. To wit, recall past debacles like "Chicken Soup" and "The Today Show" mess.

**3) Strive to create your own media form if one doesn't exist.** Traditional advertising options are usually the workhorses of a communications effort. Creative media applications have their place as well. With new cable networks popping up regularly, and various selective media forms (television in medical waiting rooms, beauty salons and health clubs) more possibilities are available every day. Still, a wealth of ideas are possible that may be relatively easy to start from scratch.

Here are a few homegrown agency ideas that I've heard. That they haven't come to fruition yet isn't the point; that they are new, viable ideas with promise is. One idea I liked was the possibility of showing a brand's alphanumeric message on automated teller machine screens. Banks could sell space and therefore use the machines as a profit center. The advertiser wins by reading an upscale audience, and consumers could benefit if part of the advertising revenue helped lower their banking fees. Another concept involves creating moveable television screens (mounted on some kind of truck) that would display programming and commercials in front of groups of people, say those waiting on line at a theatre. The truck could, drive from place to place

in major cities and, in theory, could reach a lot of people. These ideas aren't that far out, especially when you compare them to some of today's oddball media opportunities, (such as the company that sells messages on the bottom of golf cups on public and private courses). AS you read this, someone is working on putting advertising messages on eye examination charts.

**4) Don't be afraid to explore the use of media buying services.** This suggestion pertains most often to small or medium size agencies, but can apply to larger ones as well. If your department doesn't have a big buying group or if you haven't been buying the major markets for a while, these firms can help. Most people know the companies to stay away from. There are a number of first class operations that provide full disclosure and therefore minimize the worry factor. Buying services are happy to work in the

background, just for the agency. They may never meet or even talk to a client. The name of the game today is stretching the client's money, and buying services may be able to help.

**5) Unless you have airtight marketing and/or media reasons, stay away from local cable.** My experience with local cable operators is that the spot costs and efficiencies are anywhere from 10 to 20 times what they should be (compared to spot national cable or broadcast network costs prorated to the same market). These people have made good money for years by charging exorbitant prices to local business that didn't know any better. Analyze local cable efficiencies very carefully and be prepared, going in, to walk away. My feeling is that if local cable operations want to pursue national budgets, they should get their pricing in line.

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