

# Curing Copywriting Sequelitis

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Baseball players make it to the Hall of Fame when they get one hit every three times at bat. Achieving those percentages in radio copywriting is an invitation to unemployment. Your station and clients demand that every commercial be a hit. That is, until recently.

"Sequelitis" has set in with them, and unfortunately, with many of us, too. Sequelitis describes the disease that disconnects our creative brain cells when a client falls in love with a certain copy or production style and asks us to use it. Sequelitis then strikes the copywriter. The attack is characterized by mindless nodding. The resulting spot turns out to be a poor clone of the effective spot.

It's devilishly tempting to "borrow" a concept from an established spot and twist it to fit the moment's needs. We ask ourselves, "What about giving the customer what he wants? Why put in effort to develop a new idea?" Look to the motion picture industry for the answer: the sequel is *never* as good as the original. By definition, it's not original. Easy-way-out thinking has reincarnated a psycho in a hockey mask 13 times, has resurrected a mechanical shark four times, and has allowed an entire season of a nighttime soap opera to be washed away in a shower stall.

Before "Police Academy 5" starts shooting, adopt these five guidelines for original radio copywriting:

**Do more homework than necessary.** Doing what we dread most is one surefire way to break the cycle of imitation. Study the client's business or the particular promotion. See if there's an angle you've been missing.

**Don't refer to previous copy.** Resist using old spots as a reference—even if you wrote them. Use client brochures or your interview notes. The temptation to recycle old ideas will be easier to resist if you don't have an easy way to do it staring you in the face. Look at each campaign with fresh insight. You may be inspired and the spot will literally write itself.

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**Be aware of the competition.** Create a "scout file" labelled "competitive advertising." Just like the best baseball pitchers keep track of what speeds and locations batters hit best, keep track of other stations' campaigns. Your scout file will contain every bit of data that helps get a handle on clients' promotional strategies. It's impossible to be innovative without determining how the market's advertisers—and radio stations—are differentiating.

**Use a "client interview" form.** This handy sheet not only virtually assures sales reps of getting all the information they need to write an effective spot, but also provides a fast, easy way to draw on that information. It standardizes the way the information comes to you and ends the nightmare of sifting through notes scrawled on table napkins by a harried AE.

## REINFORCEMENT WITHOUT "AD NAUSEUM"

1. **Write for the ear.** Remember that radio spots are linear. If the information isn't communicated clearly, there's no going back. So, like a good news lead, make sure to communicate what's important "up top" and succinctly.
2. **Say the advertiser's name three to eight times.** Use this guideline: Three is minimum for a :30, eight a maximum for a :60. Repeat the name at the end of the spot.
3. **Mention the town or city before the advertiser's street address.** In large markets like New York, a Main Street retailer could be in Manhattan, Jersey, Connecticut, Long Island or Westchester.
4. **Be specific with area codes in large markets.** Include the area code along with the telephone number on the first and last references. If the phone number is especially important, end the spot with the advertiser's name and phone number.
5. **Write for a specific length.** Nine lines is the general rule for a :30, 18 for a :60. It's advisable to write short to accommodate last-minute updates or any copy changes.

—Jim Brownold

**Encourage clients to be bold in searching for a new creative approach.** Discourage sequelitis whenever you can. Offer to write a spot with an alternative attack to prove that "original is better." Dare to be different. You may be surprised at the positive reaction you get for taking a keen interest in doing the best job possible. □

**"Those who advertise on radio, as opposed to other media, have a physiological advantage: people are born without earlids."**

—Tony Schwartz  
Planned Reactions, Inc.