

CONFESSIONS OF A (REFORMED) ADVERTISING SALES REP

If you've ever spent any amount of money on advertising and wondered, "Did I just do the right thing?", this column is for you.

Over my 25-year career in Radio advertising, I've overseen and presented hundreds of media plans to advertisers of every size, shape and business type. Many of those plans were presented—and purchased—by local business owners like you.

I'm grateful to those I worked with as clients. I earned a decent living, and I believe I helped others improve their standards of living, too.

But there's a problem you need to know about.

With few exceptions, every media rep that calls on you really does have your best interest in mind. But you, dear Customer, keep screwing it up.

A rep will present his or her recommendations to you in the form of a proposal. And what do you do instead? More often than not, you buy the billboard that YOU drive by each day, thinking that "surely everyone sees what you see." You buy your favorite cable program, your favorite radio station, your favorite section of the newspaper, etc.

You believe you know more about advertising than the ad reps... and you buy with your heart instead of your brain.

So how do the media sales departments respond? They have numbers to hit too... so they create small, one-time advertising packages that are easy for you to get excited about, because they know you like them and can painlessly buy them, with less of an investment than you should make and no earthly hope of knowing how or when you will ever be able to tell if the investment paid off.

It's an endless circle with no winners.

If media reps did their jobs as they were truly supposed to, their fear is that no one would buy. Why? Because today's media customer—that's you-- must always feel as though he or she is right, even when they're not.

If the average small businessperson were to find a professional ad rep—from ANY media-- and allow them to advise them, chances are their business would improve. Measurably.

Where are those ad reps? They're the ones bold enough to take the right message to their customers, instead of the pre-packaged one-timers most advertisers consider "too good to pass up".

For the last two years, I've become a purchaser of media. And now that I'm on the other side, I see what all of you have been enduring for years.

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If you think there's more business to be had than you're currently harvesting, don't be afraid to ask for help.

Ask for the media's advice instead of their rate cards. Get input from each of them. Ultimately it's your decision, so what do you have to lose by asking for their expertise along with their rates?

Ask them to help you craft your business' Unique Selling Proposition. Ask them what *their* USP is. (If you don't know what a USP is, go to www.The800PoundGorilla.com and click on the button labeled "USP".)

Two things will happen when you ask these questions: you'll be a little smarter about the local media world, and it will become very obvious which media reps are worth your further investments of time and money.

Oh... and a word to all the media reps reading this column. Business owners need you more now than they ever have, but are more afraid than ever to invest in your product. Either rise to the occasion and be the best-educated, most creative rep in the field, or get out of the business.

Your clients are silently wishing for you to get better, so they can get better. What are you doing about it?

Bill Guertin, Chief Enthusiasm Officer of The 800-Pound Gorilla, works with companies of all sizes to improve their service skills, image and profitability.