

*By Bill Guertin  
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## ***Truth In Advertising: Being Who You Are***

Jim “Mattress Mac” McIngvale is a cult figure in Houston, Texas.

McIngvale is the owner and founder of Gallery Furniture, one of the largest retail stores in America. He is famous for his loud, over-the-top TV ads, which always end with him yelling in a resounding cheer, “SAVE YOU MONEY!”

He has dressed up as a mattress, screaming and throwing dollar bills around. He has sawed a mattress in half with a chainsaw to illustrate cutting his prices in half. “Mattress Mac” lives out loud.

Mac is also a big Houston Rockets basketball fan.

During the 2005 NBA Playoffs, the league issued a \$100,000 fine against Rockets coach Jeff Van Gundy for public statements he made regarding the officiating of several Rockets games. Mac, wanting to come to the rescue of his coach, came up with the idea of paying the fine, and also to secretly pay off the NBA to the tune of \$4 million to get them off Van Gundy’s back.

He asked several friends if they thought it was a good idea. They all told him to keep his mouth shut and his money in his checkbook.

All of them except one.

Roy Williams, The Wizard of Ads, is a marketing consultant and owner of a very successful ad agency. Roy and Mac were friends, and Mac knew that he’d get an honest answer from him.

“Roy, this is what I want to do. What do you think?” he asked over the phone.

“Mac, paying off the NBA would be tacky and absurd. It’s a horrible idea... which is EXACTLY why you should do it! It’s exactly who you are. Have you forgotten? You’re “Mattress Mac”!”

Mac paused for a moment, as if to process what Roy had said. And then, in that all-too-familiar shout, Roy heard Mac’s reply.

“You’re right, Roy! That’s who I am! Thanks for being honest with me. Everyone else has been trying to talk me out of it, but you told it to me straight. I need to be who I am!”

The next day, Mac offered the Rockets the \$100,000 check, and quietly offered \$4 million to the NBA to leave Van Gundy alone. The NBA politely declined, as did Van Gundy, but Mac made headlines in the sports page for his effort to pay the fine.

As a business owner, you may not be as “out there” as Mattress Mac, but you have a style, and it is uniquely your own.

Are you forgetting that in your advertising?

Every business has a personality, a uniqueness that transcends whatever it is you sell or do. So why do so many business owners insist that their ads look and sound like everybody else’s ads?

Don’t listen to everyone else’s ads. Get a pad of paper and go through this exercise:

Step #1: Eliminate these shallow phrases from your advertising immediately: It’s that time of year again; come on down; friendly, knowledgeable staff; quality service; wide selection and great variety; storewide savings; for all your \_\_\_\_\_ needs; drive a little, save a lot; held over by popular demand; it won’t last forever; making room for new inventory; hurry before the boss gets back from vacation; and any others you can identify.

Step #2: Write an ad as if you were talking to someone next to you at the grocery store or a ball game. Be honest. Genuine. Authentic. How would you talk about your business as a solution to someone’s problem? How are you different from others, not just in what you deliver, but how you deliver it? What do customers say they like about you? What phrases, mannerisms, or icons do you have that are uniquely yours? What’s memorable about your business?

Step #3: Look at what you just wrote, and figure out how to incorporate those things into your next ad WITHOUT using any of the words or phrases from Step #1.

All the influences of the outside world will tell you that this is not the way to go. It will not look or sound like anyone else. Ignore them. Go with it. Be real, and let it come out in your marketing.

The reality is this: most products and companies are considered by your prospects as being the same.

You might not like Mattress Mac, but he’s as real as they come. Like him or not, his ads are memorable, and you know just what to expect as a customer.

Isn’t that better than sounding and looking like everyone else... and being invisible?

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