

Rod Schwartz

Account Executive
KHTR-FM/KQQQ-AM
& Owner

Grace Broadcast Sales/
Radio Sales Café

Pullman, WA

Part 2

by Jerry Vigil

We wrap up our interview with Rod this month, and like we said last month, his title above is correct. Rod Schwartz is an Account Executive, a salesman, being interviewed for a production magazine. But he's not your ordinary salesman. Rod knows a few things about what we do, too, particularly when it comes to what makes radio advertising work for his clients. And he's been making those ads work for 33 years at the same stations in the small market of Pullman, Washington. But his story doesn't stop there. Along the way, Rod established Grace Broadcast Sales, a company servicing radio with syndicated "sales booster" programs as well as creative services. And more recently, he launched the fast-growing Radio Sales Café, a social website for radio salespeople.

You'll find even more great stories and worthwhile information in the conclusion of this two-part interview. You can check last month's RAP CD for some excellent commercial work from Rod with extra notes on the spots from Rod on the February CD page at rapmag.com (click on Back Issues).

JV: When you're writing a spot, how do you know when the copy is done? When do you stop writing?

Rod: Oh, I don't think I ever stop writing. In fact, I've had ads that end up on the air, and then I hear something I don't like and I'll go in and I'll tweak it a little bit then send the replacement over and say, "Overwrite what we're running now with this." But there comes a point where, let's say, you're 90-some percent convinced that the ad is ready to go, so you pull the trigger and away you go.

JV: Are there some conditions that must be met with each script before you'll send them out or certain things it must contain?

Rod: No. What I'm looking for is an effect. There's no template that I use for writing other than recognizing that I have to be able to capture and hold a listener's fleeting attention, amidst all the distractions of a person's life, for the duration of that commercial, and hopefully engage the listener to such an extent that he or she will remember that message in a meaningful way. So, what Roy [Williams] calls the "first mental image" or what Chris [Lytle] or maybe Dan O'Day would call the "headline for the ad," the opening statement, that's important. Whatever you say in the first few seconds of the ad has to be enough to identify your prospect as a prospect and grab his attention, her attention, and then, hopefully, what follows will keep them engaged.

But I don't do that with gimmicks. I try to appeal to whatever is already in that person's experience as it might relate to my advertising client and then just try to bring them together. Take the Dissmore spots I sent you for an earlier RAP CD for example. I think I sent you the bakery spot, "the maple bar in your hand is light and inviting and it was freshly baked just a few hours ago and now it's yours." Let's use this guy as an example. Dissmore IGA. It's a store that was started by the Dissmore patriarch back in the early part of the twentieth century I think. Dissmore's IGA. It stayed in the family for three generations. Finally, it was sold to a chain

operation. That chain operation became the defendant in a sexual discrimination suit for which they were not insured and the settlement cost them millions of dollars, eventually cost them the company, and they had to sell off stores.

For the time that this formerly family owned supermarket was a family business, you paid attention to it. That's your livelihood and your name's on the marquis, and you're working there every day so you take pride in it. The corporation didn't have that same sense of... loyalty to its customers, perhaps.

In any event, they let the store slide into a terrible state. It was the only store in the chain that was allowed to keep its original name because they recognized the family ties in the community. Nonetheless, the service went downhill. The quality of the products went downhill. You'd go through the meat department and find all kinds of expired products they were still trying to sell, at a discount, but still trying to sell them. I mean it was just horrible. Traffic went away and business went downhill.

Finally, when the company declared bankruptcy, this store in town was sold to the McGregor family, and at the time, they operated two other IGA stores, one in their hometown of St. Maries, Idaho. Then they had another store in Orofino, Idaho, which they subsequently sold. Anyway, they bought the store in Pullman and recognized that they had a lot of work to do, but if they were successful, it would be a great opportunity for them to build up this store with a fine heritage.

So I started working with them. I think it was in 2007 when they bought the business, and I had the opportunity to do a whole rebranding. My approach was this: rather than try to do in one ad, painting in broad strokes, how wonderful this family owned supermarket was, I took it down to the micro level. I talked about the maple bar, the 50 year old maple bar recipe, and we'd do a spot on the maple bar as representative of the bakery, and a spot on Atlantic salmon as representative of the seafood department.

So, in a series of messages in which I tried to convey the care and the quality -- the care that people had in each



of these departments, the department managers, and the quality of the products that they were selling -- we were able in the first year to grow their traffic and business 18 percent. They were doing enough radio that they knew this was significant. This was the only thing they were doing differently. They were still doing the flyers -- you know, the weekly price and item stuff -- but what they added to the mix was radio.

So they became kind of a local poster child for me because people from the mayor of Pullman on down were commenting about the ads and going into the store and buying the maple bars and buying the salmon and talking to the people in the store about how they were in because they had heard it on the radio and thought it was pretty good.

If you listen to those ads, I may be engaging the imagination a little bit, but not trying to stretch it into the area of unreality. I'm simply trying to convey to the person who likes seafood that you really should try their seafood department because you enjoy quality seafood and you enjoy fresh seafood and it doesn't get any fresher than what they sell. And the same thing with the produce and the same thing with the bakery and the same thing with the meats.

Occasionally, I will do an ad with some more creative writing just because they let me have fun. I have a great deal of latitude with this client. People enjoy that and it sticks. But it doesn't get silly.

There's a fine line between entertaining with your feet on the ground and just entertaining and going nuts.

Jim Williams used to quote Ogden Nash: "A simple rule of thumb. Too clever is dumb." That's been one of several things I've remembered over the years when I sit down to write, that it's often counterproductive to try to be so clever that you lose the message.

JV: You've been writing and producing commercials for four decades. We know that the audience has changed. But in those 40 years, do you think the approach to good copy has really changed, or is it still, as you say, just tell them the truth, generally speaking, with regards to the local advertiser?

Rod: My experience for the first, let's say, 10 years that I was in the business centered largely around writing price and item copy. So it's not very imaginative, and the purpose was not to brand the business. The purpose was simply to sell commodities. I didn't know any better. I mean this was just what I was trained to do, so that's what I did. I received a lot of training in the area of selling -- you know, how to get the money -- but I had no training in advertising. I had to get that on my own by reading David Ogilvy and by reading Al Ries and Jack Trout, and by reading a book that Chris Lytle recommended: *Macy's, Gimbel's and Me* by Bernice

Fitzgibbon. She was a copywriter for these big department stores in the first half of the twentieth century. I want to say in the '40s and '50s. She was pulling down at that time 90 grand a year as a copywriter. Chris was also a radio sales trainer, and he got more into advertising than sales. I learned a lot from him. And I learned a lot from Dan O'Day over the years listening to his stuff, and of course, Jeffrey Hedquist, who writes for you. He always has something good to say about writing copy.

And then back in the late '90s, Roy

sent a whole bunch of ads to the Radio Advertising Bureau. I forget who the guy was at the time that I was talking to, but I said, "You know, you've got this huge library of audio commercials but you don't have any category for client voiced." He said, "Send me some stuff and we'll open the category." So I did.

I am a big believer in having the advertiser participate in the ad to one extent or another. If it's cutting the whole ad, fine. If it's just appearing at the end with a tag and an invitation to come into the business, fine. But the owner/opera-

music lessons envisions himself as one day being good at whatever the instrument happens to be. And, if you pick up a guitar, what do you want to be? A rock star, right? So that was the premise behind "Dreaming." I actually got the idea for the concept of this ad from an ad that had run for L.A. Gear sometime back.

But the point of this ad was it was recorded by one of the people who works at Keeney Brothers in an upstairs office on a portable Sony Walkman Minidisc recorder. Then I brought it back into the studio and put some music behind it. It was as far from a sophisticated performance as one might imagine, at least in terms of the production values and so on and so forth. But that ad is still on the air today along with four or five others that we subsequently developed for the series to tell the music store's story.

"...the passion that I see for radio among the members here is just really encouraging. Nobody is going to tell me that radio is a dying medium. I'm sorry."

Williams sort of exploded on the scene as I think Eric Rhoads of *Radio Ink* referred to him, radio's knight in shining armor. I really glommed onto Roy's stuff. He was saying what we were saying and believing all along, but he just managed to say it on a stage that gave him a great deal more credibility than, say, an isolated salesperson in a small market might have. He did a lot to foster belief in radio also, but his avenue of approach was not via sales, it was via copywriting.

So over the years, my emphasis was less and less on price and item copy designed to sell commodities and more and more into branding and trying to win the hearts and minds of listeners on behalf of the advertiser. That's where I've had just a lot of fun. The possibilities are much richer I think.

JV: Unlike many radio producers reading this, you like to use clients in commercials.

Rod: Yes, I've been a big proponent of client voiced commercials for years. Fifteen or twenty years ago, I

tor of a business is one of the unique attributes of the business. Certainly, he's going to be a spokesman for his business and no other.

It has been my experience that, if you're willing to invest the time in coaching, which just means repeating it over and over and over and over again -- "No, do this over again. Do that over again. No, you gotta do this." -- eventually, they break out of the reading mold and into the talking mode where they're just speaking naturally, one person to one person, which is what radio is all about, one to one, and they do a fine job.

I still, from time to time, will read things about why clients shouldn't be in ads. I had a client whose ad won the Mercury Award in 2004 -- Keeney Brothers Music Center for a spot called "Dreaming." I spent an awful lot of time with Dale Keeney trying to figure out what motivated his customers to come into the store. Over the weeks that we were talking about what we really needed to do on a commercial, the idea emerged that every person that begins

JV: Tell us about the Radio Sales Café. How did it start and what are the sites objectives?

Rod: Well, three years ago, I tasked my younger daughter, who I thought had, of the four of us, the best feel for social networks, on the applicability of social networking to radio advertising, to what we were doing for GBS. So she did her due diligence, and after a week or two she reported back that she thought we should start a social network specifically for radio advertising salespeople. There were other radio, shall we say, online forums at the time, but they were non-specific. They were for the whole industry. There might be a sales chat room and a programming chat room and a production chat room and so on and so forth, but they were much broader in their focus. She thought, we really don't have anything for radio sales out there. People are using Facebook increasingly to talk to one another. So I said, "Okay, we'll bankroll it and see what comes of it."

Our goal at the outset was to provide a forum where radio advertising sales professionals in distant markets could talk to one another about the problems, because all the problems in radio advertising sales are common from market to market. You really don't run into anything new here that somebody

isn't encountering in another market. Questions like: "What do I do about the client who says this" or "I've got a hospital that wants to advertise and I'm not sure what to offer them" or "I'm new to radio sales. Can you give me some advice?" You know, that kind of thing.

We didn't put a whole lot of restrictions on the site other than we weren't going to tolerate flaming, and we weren't going to tolerate spamming either. We wanted this to be a place where quality discussions about radio advertising could be facilitated, where people could help each other out with sharing ideas, sharing resources, answering questions, talking about their successes, and so on and so forth. And it would be a member driven site. We spend time there every day, but we don't, shall we say, *run* the site. The members run the site.

Now, two and a half years into it, it has certainly exceeded our expectations in terms of membership and participation. If you do a search on the site, for example, for "I'm new to radio sales,"

the outpouring of advice and empathy from people who have been in the business 15, 20, 30, 40 years and more for these new kids is just phenomenal. And the passion that I see for radio among the members here is just really encouraging. Nobody is going to tell me that radio is a dying medium. I'm sorry.

JV: The members are mostly salespeople that are selling local direct I assume, and probably from all market sizes, is that correct?

Rod: All across the country, yes, from the majors right down to markets as small as they get. And we have a number of international members as well: Africa and Australia, New Zealand, England, Ireland, Spain. We also have some copywriters, producers, even a few voiceover guys who belong and once in a while participate. I think in that category they'd love to get some work from radio stations, and while, as I said, we don't tolerate spamming and it's not a site for people to come on and just start hitting radio stations up for business, we certainly welcome people with something to contribute to the discussion.

To do so, each member has his own personal page, and if you're a jingle producer or if you're a voiceover artist and you want to put all this stuff about your business on your personal page, that's great. We welcome that. What we don't want are people sending spam emails or discussions out there that are simply fishing for business. We offer advertising opportunities for that if people want to take that route. So, you'll find some jingle producers on the site, for example, who have been marvelous contributors to the discussion, and they post examples of their work; and whether anything has come of this or not, I don't know.

One thing I suppose I should mention is a thing called the Swap A Spot Network. One of our members in Pennsylvania -- her name is Jennifer Bliss -- started this network of station producers and voiceover people. You know in small markets you're always needing more voices, right? You have a few people doing most of the ads. So anytime you can get fresh voices on the

air, that's a good thing for the station. It's just that the stations aren't willing to pay for it, generally speaking. And it's our own fault because whoever decided years ago that radio production should be free really set us up for shackling ourselves in that way. What do you get for free? Honestly, what do you get for free? Generally, the quality defaults to that cliché riddled drivel that passes for a lot of radio advertising. It's unfortunate, but that's just the reality in stations of every size in markets of every size.

But anyway, she started this thing called a Swap A Spot Network where you can hire one of the voices on the network to do production for you, and you pay for it by doing production for somebody else. Not lucrative in the cash sense but certainly beneficial to the radio stations.

JV: Well, if there are people out there willing to do that, the station benefits. If the station is benefitting, then it benefits the employees.

Rod: And hopefully it ultimately benefits the advertiser.

JV: You're a lot closer to the mind of the radio production guy than the typical salesperson. What do you think radio production people might most misunderstand about salespeople?

Rod: Well, there's certainly the stereotypes, you know, Herb Tarlek in his loud checkered sport coat, not a clue about advertising and willing to say anything to get somebody on the air. You put him in the same room with a copywriter or producer who is passionate about doing good radio, and it's going to be an oil and water situation.

One of your faithful readers and a fellow I'm privileged to call a friend and a member of Radio Sales Café is Blaine Parker. When he worked for Salem in Los Angeles, he was butting heads with salespeople all the time. What frustrated him, and rightly so, was the lack of concern on the part of a salesperson, the lack of awareness maybe on the part of a salesperson of the importance of what you say in the ad. It's not just run anything and it will work for the advertiser.



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What you say is the most important part of the whole campaign.

Blaine, being a very good copywriter and producer and having a real passion for the business, would offer to step in to visit with the client to try to uncover the client's story and to help the salesperson. I'm sure those that responded to his offers were grateful for the opportunity, but there were others that, as he describes it, he'd just be butting heads with all the time.

When I invited him to join Radio Sales Café, he was concerned that it would be a matter of coming in as kind of an adversarial relationship with the members. But, in fact, it hasn't been that way at all. When Blaine finds time to contribute, he's always very gracious and usually spot on with his advice.

So it doesn't have to be an adversarial relationship, and if it is, I will fault the salespeople more than I will fault the production people. Now in either case, if you're carrying a stereotype about what the other is or a grudge for what they do, it's not a very good situation. But, when the goals of the salesperson and the advertiser and the copywriter and the producer all align, wonderful things happen all the way around.

For example, I've worked with an eye doc for about 12 years now. You know how the jingle companies used to have these one day meetings where they asked the station to fill a banquet room with advertisers, and then they'd tell their jingle story and a number of the people who attend the meeting would be interested and then they'd meet one on one with the jingle guy. I invited this eye doc to one of those meetings, and afterwards he just wasn't convinced that a jingle was going to be right for him, and so he said, "Keep thinking, keep thinking."

It occurred to me that this guy -- he was young, taking over his father's practice -- he was bright. He was always reading in his profession -- always keeping up with the journals and so forth. He was a fountain of information. So I said, "Why don't we do something called: 'Ask Dr. DeVleming: Answers to your vision questions by Dr. Jim DeVleming of Pullman.'" He thought that was a

pretty good idea. That was 12 years ago and he's been doing it every day, every year, ever since.

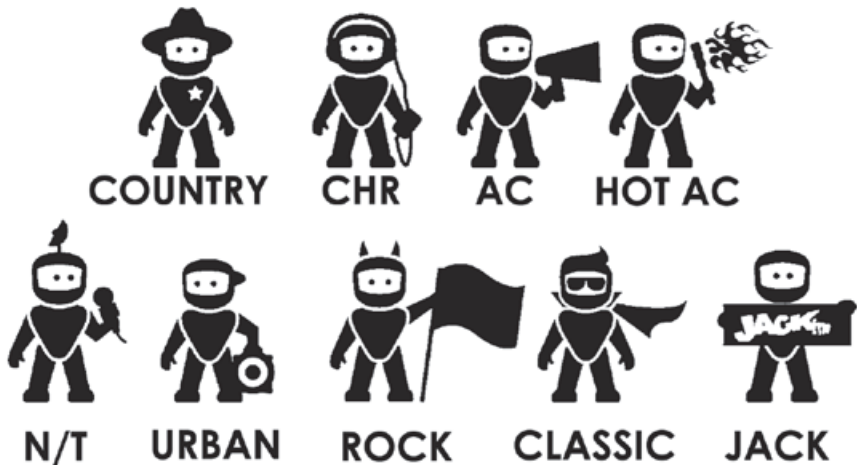
Now some would say -- and I've been told by other clients -- he doesn't really have a voice for radio. But you know what? He sounds just like an eye doc. He's not pretending to be an announcer. He's pretending to be an eye doc answering questions. The marvelous thing about his campaign... Holland Cooke, the talk radio consultant from McVay Media, he came into the market once and happened to hear one of Jim's spots on the air. He wanted a copy of it to take to his clients because he said, "You know, that's an ad, but it doesn't sound like an ad." And he's right. It doesn't. It sounds like one guy who is an expert in his field giving advice, dispensing information to people who might have an interest in it. And in 12 years of doing this series, he has never said, "Come into my practice. I want you to check out my eyeglasses. I want to introduce you to this thing, that or the other that I'm doing." His call to

action has never been to use his business. His call to action has always been "Ask your eye care professional. Talk to your eye care professional about it."

That approach is gutsy, I mean it really is. To spend your own money telling people "talk to your eye care professional." But what it did was plant his flag in that part of the consumer brain that said "I'm the expert. I'm the authority in this field." So people naturally gravitated to his business. He's on record as having said, "New business alone has more than paid for my radio advertising."

JV: A production person at a radio station would love to have a sales guy like you because you understand. Too often we deal with the stereotypical salesperson with the last minute requests, notes on a napkin, this spot starts tomorrow. What would you say to radio production people that have one or two of those guys scattered in their sales force about helping the salesman understand what you are

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saying to us right now? How would you direct a production person to get the attention of that salesperson and help them understand that there's more to it than just getting the buy?

Rod: Assuming that we want to be on friendly terms, since we're co-workers at the radio station, I would say, "Look, I want to make a deal with you. I would like to spend a day with you in the car as a silent observer watching what you do in sales because I want to understand your world. I don't understand it. All I see is the production order with your initials stapled to the napkin on which you wrote your notes" or whatever. "But I want to understand what it is you do. But I'm going to ask you to do something for me too because both of us want the same thing. We both want this thing to work for the advertiser. You want it to work because you want to sign an annual contract and you don't want to get an objection at renewal. You don't want to get an objection when the rates go up. You want to maintain an ongoing and growing relationship with this client for as long as you're at the radio station. I understand that. That's great."

"What's going to determine whether you have that relationship or not are if his ads work because, if his ads don't work for him, your best efforts and scintillating personality and free tickets to the concerts and all the rest of it notwithstanding, if those ads don't work for the client, he's not going to buy advertising from you. So they have to work, and I'm the guy that you've entrusted, that you've asked to make these ads work for him. I need more than a production order and a napkin."

That's the kind of conversation I guess I would want to have.

JV: And you would ask the salesperson to spend a day with the production guy?

Rod: I would. Absolutely. I think each has to immerse himself in the world and work of the other if he's really going to understand it. Better still, go as a team to the advertiser and sit in on that meeting. Invite the advertiser into the radio station and have him talk both to the salespeople and the copywriters



and producers. You know, this thing can happen in a small market. I don't know about the bigger companies. I don't know what goes on there. They do very little local direct. Their business is primarily driven by agencies and ratings points and all the things that I don't care about.

JV: You care about the one thing that the client really cares about though, and that's getting results.

Rod: Absolutely. That's the bottom line. That is what keeps him on the air. And you know this idea of churn: "I tried radio once and it didn't work for me." So you go out and find some other sucker and sell him a lot of advertising that doesn't work, and then, when he finally won't renew or cancels, then go to the next guy. That's not a way to have a satisfying career in radio sales, not from my point of view anyway.

JV: Any final thoughts for our readers?

Rod: I would like to invite your readers, if they wanted to hang out at Radio Sales Café and participate in discussions, ask questions, whatever, I'd gladly encourage them to do so with the caveat that it's not a place to get into an argument with people. We have a very short tolerance of that kind of thing. But, if they really want to learn about what

makes salespeople tick and, at the same time, maybe share their own insights into what makes advertising work, I'd welcome that because that is really the spirit of Radio Sales Café. We're all in this together to try to do a good job for our advertisers, a better job for our advertisers so that radio grows.

Our thanks to Rod for this wonderful 2-part interview! Be sure to visit his sites at RadioSalesCafe.com and GraceBroadcast.com. Rod welcomes your comments and questions at Rod@GraceBroadcast.com.

