

Chapter 51

Nitroglycerin

Jingles, drama, humor and testimonials are the nitroglycerin of advertising. Used properly, these things have the power to move mountains for you. Handle them carelessly and they'll blow up in your face.

Musical jingles can surprise Broca, but more often they put him to sleep. As you learned in chapter 32, never get caught using a mediocre jingle. If it's not a killer, kill it.

Drama gives us the power to compel by tapping into the customer's imagination. Can you produce a dramatic reenactment that won't be perceived as transparent and contrived? Predictable drama is counterproductive when it's seen by the public as a clumsy attempt to manipulate them. No one likes to feel manipulated.

Humor can sharpen the point of an ad like a whetstone, but it's just as likely to blunt your point and make the ad unproductive. Does your humor reinforce the point of the ad, or is it merely a gratuitous distraction? Often, the customer will remember the humor, but nothing else about the ad. Is your goal to entertain--or to persuade?

Whether ad lib or scripted, testimonials are simply another form of drama. Though your testimonial may be completely genuine and authentic, unrehearsed and unsolicited, this does not require the public to believe it. If the finished testimonial ad isn't utterly convincing, drop it like a hot rock.

Extreme caution is essential when handling things of great power. "The greater the power, the more difficult the control" is just as true in advertising as in thoroughbred horses, nuclear physics, racing engines, and fame.

The Wizard's advice concerning nitroglycerin: Never attempt to create a musical jingle or to use drama, humor or testimonials in your ads unless you're prepared to walk away from the effort should the result fall short of the mark. Are you willing to discard a finished ad that misses the bullseye? Or would you feel compelled to use it anyway?