

Writing For Media

Week 12

Ads and PSAs:

Copywriting for the Visual Media

Introduction

- Before TV, there was radio advertising and film advertising in cinemas.
- The principle of selling time between programming for commercial messages grew up with the visual media.
- A format that is unique to TV was developed to deliver short visual commercial messages very efficiently and effectively in breaks between programmes.
- The air time was sold to advertisers to generate operating revenue and profit for the TV companies.

- Because TV is the most expensive advertising medium, it has driven writers and producers of commercials to refine their techniques so as to deliver a complete message in a small amount of time. The cost of this time far exceeds the production cost of making the message itself.
- Ads are special because they are short—usually under a minute.
- Almost all TV viewers have seen public service announcements (PSAs), which are messages that are broadcast for the public good.
- PSAs are sometimes paid for by sponsoring organisations, but they are usually furnished to broadcasters to fill any empty spots in the commercial break.

Client Needs and Priorities

- The PSA and TV ad are works commissioned by a client.
- The client needs a solution to a communication problem that the writer must provide.
- You write for someone who represents the interests of an organisation.
- Successful communication can only be measured by quantifying audience responses as changes in sales or behaviour.
- Advertisers expect to measure the effect of an ad in increased sales; otherwise there is no business sense in spending money on it.
- PSAs, on the other hand, aim to change people's behaviour.

Seven-step Method for Developing a Creative Concept

- This seven-step method for developing a creative concept is important to approach these copywriting assignments.
- ***Define the communication problem:*** what is their needs, budget, medium of choice?; collaborate with the writer, illustrator and the client; important to write to communicate effectively and NOT for personal expression or artistic reasons.
- ***Define the target audience:*** It is impossible to talk about any communication problem without bumping into the question of who is the target audience. If you change the audience, you change the kind of problem and the objective. Two words are necessary to know...

... about that refer to techniques of identifying the character of audiences – *demographics* and *psychographics*.

(Demographics are the common characteristics of a group of people so that you can define them as target audiences e.g. age, gender, race/ethnic origin, education, income group).

(Psychographics are the attitudes, emotions, attention span, information overload and mental outlook or state of mind of an audience group).

- **Define the objective:** the communication objective is closely associated with the communication problem; one states the problem the other states the outcome; e.g. is the objective to achieve 10% increase in sales or 5% decrease in costs or 10% decline in teenage pregnancies. Most advertising depends on visual stimulation of the emotions to shift attitudes.
- **Define the strategy:** To write a successful copy/script that solves the problem, we need to figure out how to achieve the objective, reach the target audience and suggest the content that leads to effective communication. If you want an audience to think, feel, or act in a certain way, you need a strategy. You could use humour, a story, suspense, shock, intrigue, footage, testimonial or a case history.

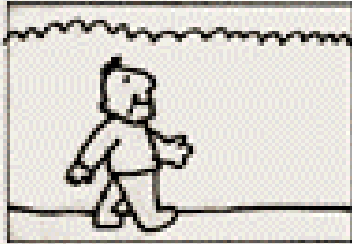
- **Define the content.** What are we going to see and hear on screen? What is the programme going to be about? What happens in the story or narrative of the programme? Content must only be determined after defining the problem, audience and objective. Content is what you see. It is the substance of the programme.
- **Define the appropriate medium:** All media have particular qualities and peculiarities that give them strengths and weaknesses. The concept we devise has to work for the medium, or we have to pick the medium that will work for the concept.
- **Create the concept.** Devising a creative concept that will translate all the previous needs into a working script. It is a creative task and not an analytical task. This is the source of freshness, originality, clarity, and visual intelligence that makes a programme compelling to watch.

The 20-, 30-, and 60-second Playlets (Moving/animated ads)

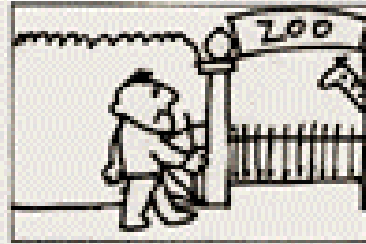
- Ads in the form of 20- or 30-second playlets are a popular art form born of the TV age and the need to compress visual messages into short, expensive time slots.
- The copywriter is not a full range scriptwriter and also usually has to write print media ads.

Visual writing

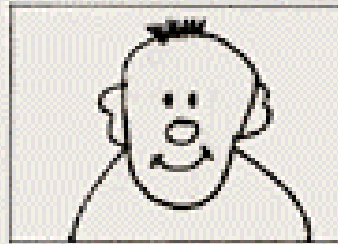
- Media writing, particularly TV advertising, needs a visual idea.
- The scene descriptions contribute to a visual idea that transcends the screen moment and rests on many of those moments. It is an idea that informs and governs the written detail of the script.
- This is the reason why a storyboard is used to demonstrate the visual idea.
- Radio ads, on the other hand, need dialogue writing but not a visual idea.
- So visual writing is the idea as well as the description of specific images and shots.



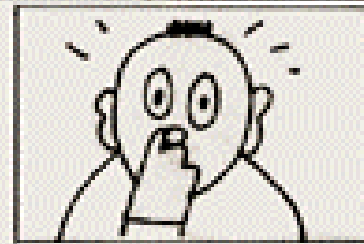
John goes for a walk



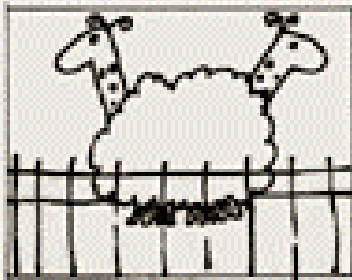
to the Zoo.



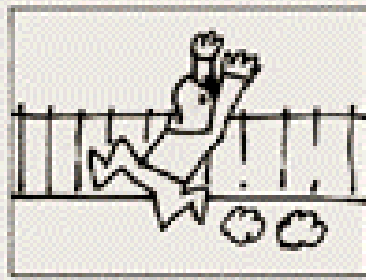
He looks



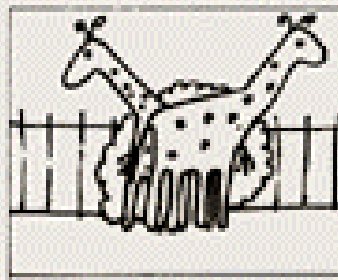
and sees



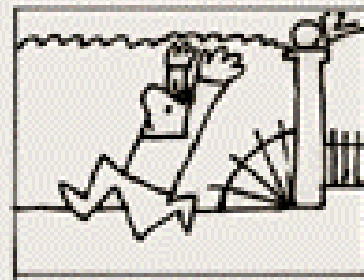
a monster!



Help! help! Help!



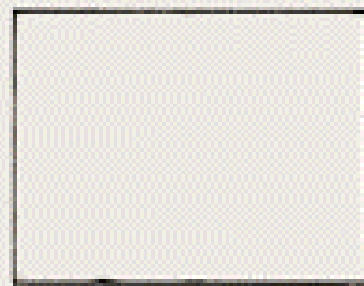
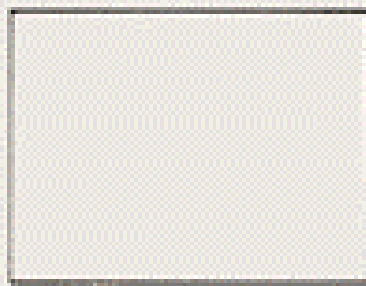
The Giraffes smile.

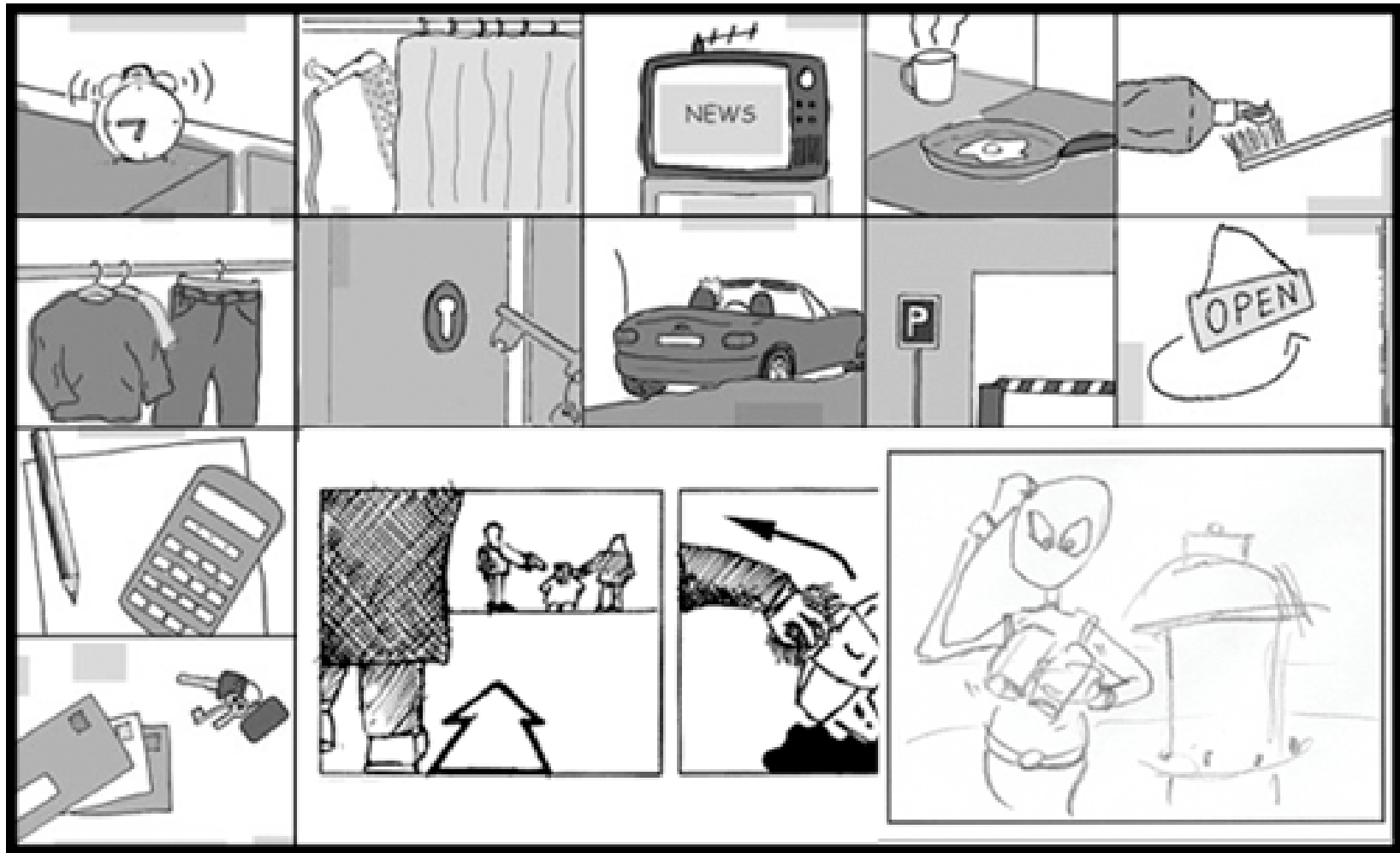


John runs away.



He feels silly.





Billboards/Posters and Transportation Ads (Static Ads)

- Billboards are a form of visual communication for commercial purposes that has evolved with the increase in consumer ownership of automobiles.
- People riding on surface public transport (i.e. buses, LRTs, trains) also see billboards, as do pedestrians.
- Large surfaces such as the sides of buildings become canvases for outdoor ads that have developed a style and technique appropriate to the medium.
- The primary method of how a billboard works is its method of delivery.

- Delivery of the message depends on drive-by duration.
- You do not see crowds gathering around billboards, as the dominant audience of billboards is the motorist or passenger of a motor vehicle.
- The slight line from the billboard to the viewers exists for a matter of seconds as the vehicle drives by.
- This fundamental context for reading billboards and posters leads to several logical axioms about billboard copywriting:
- The message has to be comprehensible within seconds
- There has to be a strong visual idea behind the billboard
- Text takes too long to read and has to be limited to large phrases

- The visual idea can work independently of text
- Messages use strategies of humour and shock, just like TV ads
- Successful campaigns become series (e.g. Milo, Digi)
- The billboard illustrates well the difference between informational, motivational and behavioural objectives.

- In 1999, the Outdoor Advertising Association of America commissioned a study to measure motorists' response to outdoor advertising. The study shows that the following elements are important and register with an audience as follows in descending order of importance (i.e. highest being most important)
- Bright/cheerful colours 30%
- Uniqueness (movement/extensions) 26%
- The colour 'yellow' 18%
- Catchy/clever/cute/humourous 14%
- Personal relevance 14%
- Familiarity/repeat exposure 12%
- Product illustration 12%

- The billboard and signage industry is the domain of the copywriter.
- The copywriter is going to have to work closely with a creative director or a graphic designer so that the very few words allowed on the billboard achieve concision, bounce off and complement the visual. The text stripped out would probably mean very little unless it were a company slogan or motto.
- We see that visual writing is critical to an advertising copywriter's arsenal. It applies to transportation posters and to full page print ads which often work like posters with a key phrase that unlocks an image.

- The visual has to be strong to attract the reader flipping through pages of ads to get to the articles in a magazine.
- The kind of writing to develop—compressed, elided, visual—is common to copywriters in an advertising world.