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Advertising and the Recession

“I have to cut my advertising budget; there’s a recession going on....”

Sound familiar?

When times get tough for a business or organization, advertising budgets are often the first expenses to be evaluated. Traditionally, most retail businesses see fewer customers in the dead of winter or during the long, hot days of summer, when customers are on vacation, not just from their jobs, but from patronizing your business. And in a recession, every organization feels the pinch.

So how deep will this recession be? It’s possible that the stock market’s precipitous drop since early last fall is simply a normal correction, or it could be a reaction to ever-increasing bad news: the wars, the crises in the sub-prime lending, alt-a mortgage and student loan industries, the price of gasoline and the ripple effect on grain prices, particularly wheat and corn. Once considered the ravings of fanatic doomsayers, it’s now possible that we may soon be paying \$4.00 a gallon for gasoline and \$5.00 for a loaf of bread. Across the world recently, there have been food riots. Could it happen here?

It’s not a pretty sight, and it’s easy to get caught up in gloomy forecasts.

When there are fewer dollars to spend, confidence erodes, fears increase and

In This Issue

Advertising and the recession	1
What Is A Kopywriter?	4
Y Did U Spel it So Funy?	5
Kopywriter Bio	5

consumers, voluntarily or involuntarily, sharply curtail their budgets. And that affects businesses, for-profits and nonprofits alike, churches, volunteer organizations; everyone. When revenue shrinks and expenses don’t, cutbacks are required.

A knee-jerk conservation mode sets in: supplies are rationed or allowed to shrink to lower levels before they’re re-ordered, expense accounts are tightened, “frivolous” or unnecessary expenditures are denied. But if the downturn continues or shows few signs of ending, further cutbacks are needed. Sometimes, layoffs result and some unfortunate businesses shutter for good. And what about advertising?

“If no one’s going to spend anyway, if no one’s going to buy or donate, why should we waste our dollars?”

That’s a fallacy as maddeningly common as the erroneous assumption that cutting employee hours will help the bottom line. How many times have you, as a consumer, been frustrated by the lack of help you require in a store that is obviously understaffed? Are you patient, understanding that the inconvenience is temporary, or do you walk out, vowing to never return? And when you do finally get some-

one to wait on you, are they so stressed by the extra workload that they're less friendly, less efficient, less helpful? Is it so crazy to assume that if there were more people working, more people would be helped, more customers would stay (and spend!) and that the company's CSI (Customer Satisfaction Index) would improve?

"If you don't do anything, you'll wind up with nothing."

Consider this: a perhaps apocryphal story goes that as a marketing test several years ago, McDonalds adopted a one-day nationwide moratorium on all radio and television commercials. It was an exceptional step for a company that fully understood that advertising, *even when there is nothing specific to sell*, is vitally important. For years, McDonalds would air "image" breakfast commercials at the end of local late news TV broadcasts; the reasoning being that a final impression before the tube was turned off for the night would drive customers to Mickey D's the next morning for an Egg McMuffin. As the story goes, overall sales at all locations dropped precipitously because of that one-day "no ads" test.

Whether true or not, the point is important: if no one knows you're there, if you aren't constantly reminding your clientele about your existence, they'll forget about you. Or worse, they'll go elsewhere. If you're lost in the woods and you don't signal for help, who will come to rescue you? And if someone else is also lost and conversely, is shouting at the top of their

lungs, building a signal fire, or doing it with mirrors, which person will likely be saved?

So what does all this have to do with a recession?

If you think about it, recessions or economic slowdowns are no different than your typical slow periods, except more pronounced. Not to mention scarier.

"But it makes sense to cut unnecessary expenses. How do we know our advertising dollars are really working?"

The answer to that is startlingly simple. Your advertising dollars, your promotional efforts, your marketing materials **DO** work when:

- ◆ More people walk through the door
- ◆ The phones are ringing off the hook
- ◆ You can't keep up with your emails
- ◆ Your cash register receipts or donations *increase*

When you **don't** advertise, when your promotions are weak or unexciting, when your marketing materials are pedestrian:

- ◆ Fewer people walk through the door
- ◆ You can answer the phone patiently
- ◆ You have time to delete spam and junk email and even surf the internet
- ◆ The only time you think about receipts is wondering if you spelled it right

The bigger question concerning your advertising, promotional or marketing campaign should be: who writes it?

Every organization relies on writing, every day. Unless you pay someone to write, whether on staff or by contracting out, chances are, some of your most important writing is left in the hands of those who aren't trained for it. Someone for whom writing is a chore, or a task to be rushed through and pushed as quickly as possible from the "inbox" to the "out." Often, in times of tightened staffing, you're the one writing the article, business letter, newsletter, brochure or public relations piece. Is that how you want to spend your time?

What you can't forget is that everything that goes out under your organization's logo or letterhead reflects on you.

Don't delude yourself... **every single word** makes an impression.

Is your written material as effective as it can be, are you getting results? Think of the last project you or your staff completed. Did it really do everything you wanted it to do? Did it produce? Did your customer count increase, did the phones ring, did your bottom line improve?

It all starts with the writing. Because no matter how extensive or focused your advertising, no matter how splashy your graphics, if the words aren't persuasive, no one's buying.

As the recession builds or drags on, that first impulse is to cut advertising, but as we've discovered, if you aren't reminding people of your products, services, or your very existence, you run the very real risk

that your own personal recession will just spiral deeper. Although people are creatures of habit, they're also very resourceful. And in hard economic times, they'll find other solutions which may no longer include your business.

So pledge this:

- ✓ It's the time to increase mailing efforts, not decrease them.
- ✓ It's the time to create new slants for old messages, so your pleas are heard and not ignored.
- ✓ It's the time to consider hiring a professional writer.

Yes, a professional writer is an added expense. A professional writer can't possibly have the same dedication and desire to help as you and your staff. It will also take time to educate the writer, so he or she completely understands your goals, your commitment, and your passion.

But professional writers bring something else to the table: we're trained to persuade, even when our understanding is not as complete as that of industry experts.

Our mission is to craft messages for those who have even less of an understanding of your services, as well as your specific needs, problems and challenges.

Our job is to create products that convince those on the fence, that remind those who've forgotten, and in turn prompt readers to open their wallets, take out their checkbooks, or whip out their credit cards.

The Freelance Advantage

- You don't take valuable time away from the everyday duties of your staff.
- You don't have to pay us benefits, or offer perks
- You don't have to work around coffee breaks, lunch hours, or time off.

As freelancers, we take care of all those things for ourselves, so you don't have to. We'll get your job done invisibly, and present you with polished, complete works which are everything you expect and more, in a timely fashion.

So if you're considering cutting back on your marketing efforts, consider the dangers of not promoting your cause. Remember that forest... if you're lost and you don't call for help, who will even look for you?

Call the Kopywriter or email today for a no-obligation consultation for your next writing project: brochure, newsletter, sales or fundraising letters, web content, or just everyday writing, to take the pressure off you and your staff.

The Kopywriter... the "staff writer" not on your staff, but on your side.

If you're not in the market for a freelance copywriter today, you may have needs in the future. Please send for a free information kit from The Kopywriter!

What is a "Kopywriter?"

Strictly speaking, "kopywriter" is a made-up word. Check the sidebar on page 5: "Y Did U Spel it So Funy?" Of course, it's really copywriter.

Successful businesses seek expert copywriting from outside sources whenever they don't have the time, experience or patience to craft first-class communications from within. They need copywriting in all its forms:

- electronic ad copy for radio or TV
- print for brochures, newsletters, flyers and booklets
- direct mail, sales letters, catalogs and public relations
- everyday business writing, editing and proofreading
- and more than ever, web content.

In these uncertain times, you might be looking to update your resume, one that's power-packed with keywords that ensure you more than a five-second look, a resume that will get the HR manager, recruiter or headhunter to pick up the phone and call you for that interview. Contact the Kopywriter!

Above all, they demand affordable copywriting that's prompt, clean, and persuasive. It must be creative, with grabbers that attract potential clients so they can be turned into long-term customers. And here's a tip: it's not necessary to throw in a ton of flashy graphics for a website. People click on your site for just two reasons: they want information, and they want it now. It's the words that matter, the words that count!

Y Did U Spel it so Funy?

The definition of “copywriter” is as follows:

Copy-y-writ-er: [kop'-ee-raht-ter]-noun

a writer of copy, esp. for advertisements of publicity releases. *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1).*

Based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, © Random House, Inc. 2006

In Middle England, many craftsmen and artisans earned the appellation “wright” for their area of expertise; for example: shipwrights, millwrights, wheelwrights, and even playwrights. By extension, then, a “copy-wrighter” would reflect that attention to detail and craftsmanship.

Then why change the spelling? It's a humble affectation: my last name is Kaye. So *voila!* A revised definition:

Kopywrighter (kop'-ee-right-er) (noun)

- 1) One who writes advertising copy
- 2) a freelance writer
- 3) pen for hire
- 4) the “staff writer” not on your staff
- 5) the professional writing partner for your next sales, promotional, fundraising or marketing campaign
- 6) me (Bill Kaye)



*“Fundraising
is
Advertising
is
Marketing”*

Bio

The Kopywrighter is Bill Kaye, Production Director for WJBR-FM in Wilmington from 1985-2005. As Production Director, Bill was the primary copywriter, creating over 8000 individual radio spots for virtually every type of business, service or product. Bill's special talent is in digesting complicated and detailed notes, and writing radio spots that inform the listener as well as prompting that all-important “call to action.” Bill's strengths are creativity, dependability, promptness and a dedication to detail and accuracy, ensuring that there were virtually no “make-goods” required for inaccurate or dated copy.

Recently, Bill has been involved in consultative sales, particularly business-to-business sales, and thus brings a unique perspective and understanding of the demands of businesses and organizations.

A desire to make a difference in his community drove Bill's 10 years service with a youth baseball league, as President and later as Registrar, long after his own children had left the league. Bill wrote all of the league's materials, including fundraising and recruitment letters, handbooks, newsletters, brochures, and advertising and marketing peripherals.

Bill is also the author of two published novels:

The Killing of Bill Doolin
(Leisure Books, 1980)

Wrong Target
(Leisure, 1981)