

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO AN ANGRY AUTO DEALER?

By Dan O'Day



DAN
O'DAY

A subscriber to Stevens & Grdnic's *Daily Comedy Exclusive* (www.allstarradio.com) submitted a problem to DCE's newsletter. I am reprinting that letter here (with permission), along with my own suggestions on how to deal with this situation.

We are a 25-kilowatt station, upgraded five years ago. We went from covering Smallville (25,000 people) to covering Smallville and Largerville (another 25,000). The local Smallville car dealers have

held a gun to our heads since then, saying they would drop us if we put any out-of-town dealers on.

An out-of-town outfit came in here and offered us three times what the local dealers spend in a month for four days' advertising and a remote. The local car dealers leased the land next to where the out-of-town guys came in, and it was ugly. Shouting matches and fistfights ensued. One of the local owners tried to pick a fight with me during the remote broadcast.

The following Monday they canceled their advertising — three dealers, as a group. We showed them the regulations that require us to accept such business and explained that this was unsolicited. No matter. They are gone.

We're trying now to solicit business from Largerville. So far we have some nibbles, but no business yet. What do you do in a situation like this?

DAN REPLIES

Put together a special package especially for auto dealers outside the city limits. With an attractive price. By that, I do not mean a dirt-cheap price per spot regardless of order size; I mean a good-sized package, but at a better price than anything you're offering elsewhere. But you do not sell this package based on price. You sell this package with the following personal letter:

It's every car dealer's dream: A chance to sell cars without your competition fighting for your customers!

Dear Fred Dealer:

How would you like to be the only car dealer advertising to the city of Smallville ... and still reach your Largerville customers too?

How can we make you that offer?

They threatened us.

When a car dealer located in Largerville wanted to advertise with WXYZ, the Smallville car dealers threatened us: "If you allow outsiders to advertise, we'll pull all our commercials from your station."

Naturally, we were upset. We're particularly good at generating new customers for auto dealers. As a result, we usually have lots of automobile commercials on the air. Because we make money for them, they, in turn, have become good customers for our station.

But when WXYZ's management had a meeting to discuss this ultimatum, we quickly realized that what these dealers were doing was just plain wrong. We admire their spirit and competitiveness — hey, we're in a competitive business too! But they weren't being competitive. Quite the opposite: They were trying to prevent anyone from competing with them for the car buyers in our market.

We stood up to the bullies.

Even putting aside the legal problems that would be

caused if we agreed to their demands, what they wanted would have been bad for the people of Smallville, bad for business and bad for WXYZ.

So we politely told them that we couldn't accede to their demands and that we hoped they would understand. Well, guess what they did? They pulled all their advertising from WXYZ!

What does that mean to you?

1. Suddenly, we have extra commercial availability.

2. At the moment, no WXYZ automobile dealers are getting their sales messages to the 25,000 consumers in Smallville.

In other words, it's every advertiser's dream: an almost unheard-of opportunity to deliver your sales message to a quality audience, without competition! Now you can steal customers from your competitors.

If you're an aggressive marketer who recognizes this unprecedented chance to steal new customers, you're probably already reaching for the telephone to secure your advertising schedule. But ... one more thing:

3. To remove any possible reason for your not jumping at this "shooting fish in a barrel" opportunity, we've put together a special Outside Agitators Advertising Package just for you — at a 30% discount off the very same prices our local car dealers were getting (until they tried to force us to take part in their anti-competitive scheme).

So, let's recap:

- Advertise to car buyers without your Smallville competitors vying for the same business. (You're guaranteed to reach more prospects without any competition, right?)

- Take advantage of our suddenly available commercial inventory with our special 30%-off Outside Agitators Advertising Package.

- Strike a blow for the American tradition of good, fair competition.

- Make a financial killing from the silly behavior of some of your competitors.

Does it get any sweeter than that?

Naturally, we can make this unique offer only for a very limited time. Please give me a call today so we can plan your own personal advertising windfall.

Best wishes,

Ed Salesperson

P.S. Everything I've revealed in this letter is true, including the fact that this is a very limited-time offer. Please call me immediately, before the commercial availabilities disappear.

NOTES ON THE LETTER

- The letter is personally addressed, by name, to the person at the dealership who buys advertising.

- The envelope is delivered via FedEx. (I don't care that you can mail it for 34 cents and it will arrive tomorrow. And I don't care if you can save a couple of bucks with Airborne Express. Use FedEx. An envelope delivered by FedEx is opened before all other mail.)

- The address portion of the FedEx envelope is filled out by hand.

- Note that the P.S. reinforces the urgency of the message. The P.S. is the second thing the recipient will look at (following only the salutation, to see to whom it's addressed).

- Even though the letter indicates that you expect the recipient to call you, you call the recipient at 9:30 on the morning after the letter is delivered. When the gatekeeper asks, "What is this in regard to?" you reply, "It's regarding his FedEx proposal. He'll know what I'm talking about."

And then, when he picks up the phone — if you're any kind of a good salesperson — it's money in the bank.

A Q&A ABOUT THE LETTER

Q: But won't that upset the local car dealers?

A: Maybe. But rather than worrying about upsetting

businesses that are not only giving you money but have actively (and, I suspect, illegally) banded together to deprive you of revenue, you're better served by focusing your efforts, energy and attention on others who will give you money.

Q: But I'll be burning my bridges with them!

A: No, you won't. Look, the local car dealers aren't angry with you. They didn't initially make that threat because their feelings would be hurt if outside car dealers advertised locally. It was a business decision. Here's what they thought:

1. If outside car dealers advertise on our local station, we might sell fewer cars.

2. We don't want to sell fewer cars.

3. Therefore, it's in our best interest to prevent outside dealers from advertising here.

4. Therefore, we will try to prevent them from advertising here.

That wasn't an emotional decision. Certainly, they understand their demands are unreasonable and unfair. But they made a pragmatic decision to attempt to bully you. You stood up to them, so now they're making good on their threat. But they're not angry at you.

And you're making this special "outsiders" offer not because you're angry at your local dealers (even if you are), but because you suddenly have extra inventory to sell. Despite all the blustering and shouting, it's strictly business. (In my opinion, it's sleazy, shortsighted business on their part.)

You're in the business of helping advertisers solve problems and make more money. And, sooner or later, one of the local dealers will come to you, either because he needs to make more money or because he has a problem (needs to sell more of a certain model, needs to "turn over" inventory, needs to deliver good local numbers on a national promotion, etc.).

Q: Should I be mad at those local car dealers?

A: No. What they did stinks, but they weren't trying to hurt you. Again, they made a business decision. This isn't the first time a local business stopped being one of your advertisers.

Q: How should I treat them?

A: Like any other potential advertiser! Continue to pitch them, woo them and otherwise maintain a positive relationship with them. When one of those car dealers realizes there's more money to be made by advertising with you than by boycotting you, the dealer will once again become your client. And when that one dealer comes back, the others will quickly follow.

Q: But you can bet they'll get even more upset when they see the letter you want me to send to their competitors. That will only make things worse!

A: You must understand that, at this point in time, you are talking about nonadvertisers. Worse, you are talking about businesses that have expressly told you they will never advertise with you again. I don't believe the "never" will prove true. But, at the moment, those businesses have not earned the right to be at the top of your list of concerns. Focus on other potential advertisers who have *not* vowed to hurt you.

Q: Isn't that a very aggressive sales approach?

A: Yes. Timidity is rarely the hallmark of a successful radio salesperson.

This column is excerpted from *The Dan O'Day Radio Advertising Letter*. For your free e-mail subscription, send your request to: danoday@danoday.com with "R&R Ad Request" in the subject line, or subscribe online at www.danoday.com.