WHAT DO YOU SAY TO AN ANGRY AUTO DEALER?

By Dan O'Day

A subscriber to Stevens & Goldin's Daily Comedy Exclu-
sive (www.allstarradio.com) submitted a problem to DCE's
newsletter. We are reprinting that letter here (with permis-
sion), along with my own sug-
gestions on how to deal with
this situation.

Dear Fred Dealer:

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
that 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
holding a gun to our heads since then, saying 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 change 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' sales opportunity, we've put together
a special Outside Advertisers Advertising Package just for you
—at a 30% discount off the very same prices our local car dealers were getting (until they forced us to take part in
their anti-competitive scheme).

So, let's recap:

• Advertise to car buyers without your Smallville com-
petitors 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 Advertisers Ad-
vertising 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

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
at following only the salutation, to see to whom it's ad-
ressed.

• 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 FedExed proposal. He'll know what I'm talking about!"

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

A QA ABOUT THE LETTER

Q: But wasn'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
deserved 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 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 with you.

And you're making this special "outsiders" offer
because you're angry at your local dealers (even if
you are), but because you have suddenly have extra
inventory to sell. Despite all the blustering and
shouting, it's strictly business. (In my opinion, it's
shoazy, 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 these 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
stood up to 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
local 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
then 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 sent 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
good 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.