

Getting the read you want and need

How do you get the read you want from your voice talent in the limited time you have to get that promo on air?

It seems the place to start is not with your station voice or announcer, it's with yourself as the writer or producer.

Marice Tobias is the head of Tobias Entertainment Group, a leading industry consultant in L.A. who has, over time, affectionately become known as "The Voice Whisperer." She coaches voice talent and producers alike. The goal is always the same, to get the best product on the air. She says the best way to do that is to start at the end.

"If you're going to go on a trip, you start with where you are going," says Tobias. "From there you draw out your map. A script is a map. You need to know

where do we want to wind up. What is the goal, what is the destination? Often producers say it's to get people to watch the show or the channel. But that's your end game. What is the end game for the audience? The producer needs to put themselves in the position of the audience and basically say what am I going to get out of watching this show or watching this network?"

While her advice is geared toward directing voice talent, it can be taken right back to the writing phase to really make a promo sing. Write the promo from the audience's point of view. Why should they watch? What will they get out of it? Or in Tobias' words, "what's the destination?"

"The destination is an experience. (As a viewer) I'm going to have an experience, and it's going to be an adventure, humorous, informative. The actual takeaway from any experience, whether it's watching a program or anything in life, is a feeling. If you can identify the feeling then you have the destination."

Why is that so important?

"Because basically, a promo is a promise, a promise for the experience and the takeaway will be the feeling," she says.

Tobias says in a promo, the promise is the tease of the experience and the feeling the audience will get when they watch the show. The job of the promo is to create the desire to have the experience and feeling depicted in the promo.

Getting to that place is multi-faceted, from the visuals, graphics, music and voice. So when it comes to directing the voice, if the producer has a clear vision of the feelings and emotions of the spot, then it's simply a matter of directing the talent to put them into the state of mind necessary to deliver the right feeling of the spot.

"Once (the producer) has analyzed the material themselves, they can jot down a couple of adjectives that point the talent to the part of town that they want the read to live," she says. "But my recommendation is always give (the voice talent) a chance to give their own take on what they're doing and let them run it three



times. Then you get to see a perspective that may give you some ideas for taking the read in a somewhat different direction than you would have thought. So you are benefiting from someone coming at the material from a fresh perspective. In the case of your signature voice, it's fresh eyes, but with an understanding of what your manifest or mission statement of the network or the show is. You are essentially co-creating with this person."

She advises succinct direction.

"Generally, the number one concern (for promos) is to get the read into time. In the interest of time, (producers) sometimes say we need it quicker or faster. But if you tell a performer to just speed up, then you will get a sped-up read. But in a drama, the way to achieve speed is to add intensity or in comedy enthusiasm. Giving (the voice performer) something to "play" will give you a more qualitative read."

Another directing tip, she adds, is to keep chatter between takes to a minimum because "it takes everyone out of the zone". And when it's all about communicating that feeling, the zone is where everyone in the session needs to be.

John McGrath is a voice-over actor and writer, specializing in promos, imaging, commercials and animation. He may be reached by phone by email at info@johnsvoice.com.

An advertisement for OmniLynx FM Transmitters. At the top is the OmniLynx logo, which features a stylized green lynx head. Below the logo, the text reads "OmniLynx" in a blue, sans-serif font. Underneath that, it says "FM Transmitters" in a larger, bold blue font, followed by "Performance · Compactness · Reliability" in a smaller font. A black box with white text says "20W to 3000W". Below this, the text reads "The most compact on the market" in blue. In the center is a photograph of a silver and black FM transmitter unit. Below the photo, it says "3000W in 4RU" in large blue letters, followed by "Intelligent and Versatile" and "Also available in 2000W" in smaller black text. At the bottom, it says "Marketed and supported by: INCOSPEC" in blue, with "Your RF Transmission Expert" and "Toll free: 1 800 363-0800 · Montreal · Canada" and the website "www.incospec.com" in black.