



”Loading The Cannon With Grapeshot”

Grapeshot is a fierce weapon when it’s used effectively. You see, “Grapeshot” is a cannon load that is made up of a lot of explosive and a lot of little balls of lead. Kinda like a giant shotgun. You can imagine the damage grapeshot can do - especially if the cannon has some gunners who know what they are doing; or, if you have a whole lot of them (cannons, that is). In advertising, broadcast is the equivalent of a cannon loaded with grapeshot. You load the cannon (the medium) with a charge (the number of spots) and the shot (broad reach) and you light the fuse. The cannon goes off against the on-rushing hoards, the ones you hit get the message - the ones you miss either don’t know any different or they thank their lucky stars they WERE missed.

I don’t know about you, but I have a tendency to really dislike people who shoot at you too much (excess frequency), with really b-a-d shot (miserably bad commercials). When that happens I either kill the messenger (turn off the tube/radio), or I start to really dislike the side firing the cannon (the advertiser).

Remember GRP’s and TRP’s? Well, research has shown that the optimum level of EFFECTIVE exposure is THREE TIMES. Now, what that means is that I might fire the cannon a dozen or more times, but if I can get close to you at least three times I’m going to get your attention - really get your attention. To do that takes a combination of things that most advertisers haven’t the foggiest idea of how to do it, because - remember - this is a cannon that spits out a whole lot of devastating power.

Before we go any further, let me say that cannons are expensive. They take a lot of men to crew them; they require a lot of maintenance; they work best in groups; and they have to be supported by all of the other service arms (infantry, cavalry, etc.).

Expensive. So, if you have to ask the price ... you probably can’t afford it. And, you better have a target that isn’t too difficult to hit. Look, it’s one thing to fire away at a whole regiment with the prospect of hitting something than it is to try and pick out one squad, or even one person (like a colonel or general). To do that you need sharpshooters. No, cannons are weapons of mass destruction.

Since frequency of message is so important against a huge target (to overcome the other clutter; and, to get your point across), a lot of advertisers rely on a concept known as “Doughnuts” (or, “DoNots” - depending on your point of view). These are spots (radio or TV) that have a standard intro and out that take up about 10-15 seconds, with the rest of the spot reserved for specific sales related items. A lot of car dealers and supermarkets use this technique. This gives the advertiser a continuing level of awareness and memorability without major cost outlays - and ... AND ... - the “hole of the doughnut”, which highlights one or more brands of products, is usually paid for with Co-Op dollars. Viola ! C’est la guerre!



A major consideration is the type of creative approach: a “Product” Lead; “Personality” Lead; “Humor”; “Facts”; “Price”; “Benefits”; ad nauseam ...

The key is: produce commercials (cannon loads) that tell the people you are trying to communicate to what it is you have to offer in very broad terms.

If you are going to use a cannon ... THINK cannon. It is designed to reach masses. If you add supplemental media, THINK how it is to be used - and against whom. With the advent of VCR's and CamCorders, TV production seems inherently easy. It isn't, and should not be left to amateurs. Neither should radio production. It takes a very strange type of person to condense a selling message to 15 - 25 seconds that is effective and attention-getting. Not every one can do it. Pegram proved that to McClellan, Pope, Hooker, Meade, et al.

As we strike tents and begin saddling-up, a “Gallup”-er has brought us a communique that among the least respected occupations are advertising practitioners (please note their terminology: “practitioners”, not “professionals”). Somehow I understand that.

The next time in the saddle we'll reconnoiter some creative approaches that have worked gloriously and some that have been disastrous. 'Til then, keep you eyes peeled for the carpetbaggers and keep an edge on your saber.
