

# JUST FOR PROGRAMMERS

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## The Most Interesting Program Director in the World

*“Very few people ever did an ad to maintain the status quo”*

*--Chris Smith Creative Group Head, The Richards Group, addressing the Nielsen Audio Client Conference & Jacobs Media Summit*

As the creative leader of an advertising agency that handles a number of iconic brands including Motel 6, Dos Equis, The Home Depot, and 7-11, Chris Smith has spent a lot of time considering the anatomy of, and motivation for, advertising.

What he’s discovered is that, in general, businesses advertise to work toward resolving a conflict in the consumer’s mind. In addition to the “Got Milk” campaign which he described as “a conflict in two words” he shared several other examples with the crowd at the Nielsen Audio Client Conference & Jacobs Media Summit last month which included:

- Home Depot: You don’t think you can do that project. We say you can.
- Chick-Fil-A: You think you want a burger. We think you want a chicken sandwich.
- Nike: I can’t do it. Yes you can.

When working with a new client Smith and his team try to identify what conflict needs to be addressed in their initial creative brief, a process radio stations could learn a lot from. Instead of cranking out another liner with the same old positioning statement, start by stepping back from your day-to-day duties and considering what conflict you need to address. For example:

- A Classic Rock station’s listeners might think they only play the same songs repeatedly; instead the PD wants the audience to know the station plays a much wider variety of music from the era.
- Top 40 listeners might associate the station with only the biggest hits of the moment; instead you want to change the image for the station as a way to learn about new music.
- A Talk station might want listeners to think that, regardless of where they get information, the best analysis is only available from their hosts.

Once you’ve identified the specific conflict you need to address, commit to making all of your liners, promotions and external marketing reinforce whatever message it is you need to send the audience.

However, as Smith acknowledged, delivering the same message continually over a long period of time without becoming boring can be challenging. To help, he shared a couple of suggestions:

- **Combine expectation and surprise:** The success of Dos Equis' "Most Interesting Man in the World" campaign comes from combining these two concepts. When the spot starts we know exactly what to expect yet we listen anxiously because the new examples of just how interesting the most interesting man is always surprise us.
- **Make use of subtext:** Describing it as a way to keep ads from being something more than shouting at people, Smith says using subtext to deliver your message can be very powerful. As an example he cited the long-running Motel 6 ad campaign with Tom Bodette. The message of the spots is always the same: you are not cheap or poor if you stay at Motel 6. You are smart, frugal and don't spend money on things you don't need. But as opposed to just coming right out and saying that over and over, the commercials imply it through the commentary on life delivered by their spokesperson.

Understanding the conflict your station needs to resolve and finding consistent yet subtle and surprising ways to get that message across to your audience will certainly vault your station ahead of the competition and their repetitive positioning slogan. Who knows, it might even make you the most interesting program director in the world.

