

ARTICLE

KILLING THE CONTEST JUNKIES

by: MAUREEN BULLEY

If you've ever had to accompany contest winners on a trip, you know it's no picnic. You're on call around the clock to solve all manner of issues from an individual's inability to clear customs due to prior poor behaviour, to remedying lacklustre service at the host resort.

On one such junket many years ago, I had the pleasure of meeting a woman with whom I am still friends. She was dating a contest junkie who had been to Egypt, Florida and beyond, courtesy of his radio station winnings. For him, it was his "job" to win contests.

Today, contesting is an industry that can take the wind out of your promotional sails. They can sabotage your efforts to increase TSL, make quarter-hours grow, or generally get more listeners listening.

Few promotions are designed to preach to the converted — rather they have a deliberate strategy to achieve a programming or sales objective. Contest junkies contribute to neither outcome. Attempting to shut them out by requiring a 90-day time window between wins is about the best you can do — or is it?

Having recently scanned through the book *You Can't Win If You Don't Enter* (Imagination Edge Inc., 2005) by the self-proclaimed Contest Queen, Carolyn Wilman, I was surprised by her knowledge of the inner workings of radio promotion. She understands the methodology and the terminology. Wilman points out that the larger the radio market, the better the prize. She also cautions entrants that the bigger the prize, the more difficult it becomes to win.

The Contest Queen seldom enters radio call-in contests because she's just too busy, but does default to "Bea" from Toronto who chose her new telephone based on the speed of its redial. Bea knows that radio call-in contests can be more difficult, but she urges readers to be persistent.

The Contest Queen tells her readers to increase their odds of getting through by listening to less popular radio stations. During her first experience at winning on such a station she was not only caller number 1, she was caller 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Needless to say, she won.

We cannot prevent the contest crazy from entering, but we can cast a wider net when we write promotional material. Listen to your most recent station promotional messages. Do they gush about how great you as a station are? We have 10 trips to give away, we give you 10 chances to qualify and we want to send you to Mexico where we will broadcast live, blah blah blah.

Stop preaching to the converted. Substitute “You” for “We”, and you can dramatically increase response rates. Tell the listener what is in it for them. You will enjoy a much needed vacation. You will have many opportunities to qualify. You will have a chance to share a cocktail with our personalities. You will have some amazing stories to tell when you get back.

Be sure a net benefit is conveyed to the audience, and be sure it is meaningful to them. What does the winning provide? It could be something as simple as popularity — who will you invite when you win tickets to that sold-out concert? What will you wear when you go backstage to meet the performer? Stop talking about how great you are as a station and convince non-contest players there’s something special in it for them.

Even the Queen gets butterflies when she finds new contests and reads about all the different prizes she could win. You need to generate that kind of electricity in your audience members who wouldn’t otherwise consider entering.

Similar rules apply to promoting a sales-driven promotion. Your prizing comes from your client’s advertising and marketing budget. They need to generate sales. So, increase the success rate by biggin’ up the prize. Make it so appealing that even if the listener doesn’t win it, they’ll be tempted to go out and buy it.

Even Her Highness bought the book penned by an author with whom she won dinner. The author wanted publicity and book sales. He got both and the pleasure of meeting someone who was a celebrity in her own right.

If you craft your promotional messages with a little extra care, you’ll get lucky and hit the listener jackpot.

Maureen Bulley is President of THE RADIO STORE. She may be reached at 1-888-DO-RADIO or by e-mail at doradio@total.net