

**Make Your Radio Advertising Work:**  
**24 Expert Tips to Write and Produce Powerful Radio Ads**



# Radio Commercial **WRITING & PRODUCING**

*Written by*

**Jeff Mustard**

**A veteran advertising executive  
and multiple award-winning radio writer/producer**

# Radio Commercial WRITING & PRODUCING

## What's Inside?

What you don't know about radio advertising before your radio commercial copy makes its way into the recording booth can doom your radio campaign even before it starts, cost you thousands of dollars and damage your brand's image. The information in this book will quickly and significantly improve your knowledge-base regarding the essential factors necessary to create effective radio advertising.

## 20+ Years of Award-Winning Expertise and Experience Packed into 24 Valuable Precious Tips

This eBook is a crystallization of more than 20 years of award-winning writing and producing experience that has generated tens of thousands of consumer responses from radio listeners across the country delivering low cost, high-performance results. Jeff Mustard's creative strategies and talents have proved successful for companies large and small, in markets locally, regionally and nationally.

## 24 Powerful & Practical Strategies that will Immediately Improve Your Radio Advertising's Results

These "24 tips" are a succinct but unparalleled guide to educate prospective advertisers, company presidents, marketing directors and copywriters regarding issues critical to creating, writing and producing effective radio advertising. No other book contains as many powerful and practical strategies that will immediately and positively change the course of a company's radio advertising.

## What this Book "Will" and "Will Not" Do

This book will not teach the reader "how to" write an effective radio commercial. That is a craft earned by years of experience. What it "will do" is educate the reader concerning the essential, if not subtle factors that comprise the DNA of effective radio commercial script writing and producing.

## About the Author: Jeff Mustard

Founder | Creative Director - [www.TheRadioProducers.com](http://www.TheRadioProducers.com)

Jeff Mustard is a multiple award-winning radio copywriter and producer with a proven track record spanning more than two decades producing successful advertising across all media, with particular expertise in radio. Jeff Mustard's company, Hysterical Comedy Services provided commercial parodies, comedy skits and sketches to three of the nation's four largest radio comedy syndicators. His pre-recorded comedy material aired regularly on thousands of radio stations across the country and was heard by millions of American's.

The co-author of a Wall Street Journal best-selling book, Mr. Mustard is an award-winning documentary writer/producer/director. His extensive writings such as personal essays, comedic-oriented articles and AP-style news and feature writing, have been published and produced locally, regionally and nationally in countless newspaper and magazine articles. He was the head writer for a nationally syndicated television series, has scripted and produced too-numerous-to-count sales, marketing and promotional videos, and radio campaigns. He is the founder, principal and creative director of multiple companies, including The Radio Producers ([www.TheRadioProducers.com](http://www.TheRadioProducers.com)) a full-service radio production company.

**Jeff Mustard**

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# INTRODUCTION

## So, You're Considering Radio Commercial Advertising for Your Company?

If you're thinking about using radio advertising for your company, it's an excellent choice. Radio is a proven and powerful medium, especially if your company is looking for an immediate lift in leads or sales, seeking to drive traffic to your website or have motivated customers drive to your real live brick-n-mortar store.

In fact, a recent study by Nielsen Catalina Solutions (NCS), a prominent media research company posited, "There's a direct link between radio advertising and brick-and-mortar retail sales," further stating that, "money spent on radio is money well spent."

The study goes on to point out that, "advertisers gained an average of \$6 return for every \$1 spent."

"Radio leads all other platforms when it comes to weekly reach (93%)." \*

The above headline is the first sentence in a recently published article at Nielsen.com, the article goes on to state the following:

"What's certain is that the radio consumer is a highly qualified audience, delivered in real-time across hundreds of markets every single day...In a time of intense competition for audience attention, radio reaches more Americans each week than any other platform. Ninety-three percent of adult consumers (18+) use radio on a weekly basis, more than TV or smartphones."

*\*Nielsen.com / Audio Today: Radio 2016 Appealing Far and Wide, 02-25-2016*

## Who Will Benefit From Reading This Book?

This book is intended for, and will prove useful to, the president, marketing executive, or copywriter, for a small-to-medium sized business (SMB) – technically defined, according to Gartner, a research company, as follows:

"SMBs are categorized by the number of employees and annual revenue they have. The attribute used most often is number of employees; small businesses are usually defined as organizations with fewer than 100 employees; midsize enterprises are those organizations with 100 to 999 employees. The second most popular attribute used to define the SMB market is annual revenue: small business is usually defined as organizations with less than \$50 million in annual revenue; midsize enterprise is defined as organizations that make more than \$50 million, but less than \$1 billion in annual revenue."

The book is especially geared for SMB's because such companies may not engage in radio advertising often, or be new at it, and the chances of there being on-staff talent (with proven experience) to write and produce professional radio commercials is unlikely. Unless you have experience in the writing and production of radio commercials, chances are you don't want to experiment or gamble with the many thousands of dollars at risk when engaging in a radio commercial campaign effort. And, frankly, it is not something you should delegate to the radio station rep; well-meaning as he or she may be.

## Get Your Company's Name, Product or Services In Front of Millions of Prospects, Instantly

Radio can provide your company with nearly immediate name recognition. A well written, professionally produced radio commercial can put your brand, product or service in front of millions of Americans, instantly. And, while radio can be significantly less costly to produce, than TV commercials, it still requires a significant investment. This includes the development of the creative concept, writing and production of the radio commercial(s), and of course, the investment in the purchase of the radio air time, which can amount to tens of thousands of dollars, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of dollars.

## 24 Tips to Help Create and Produce Powerful Radio Advertising That Gets Results

In this book are 24 powerful tips that will provide you with valuable insider-industry guidance when writing radio commercial copy.



## Do Not Fund a Flawed Radio Commercial, It's a Waste of Your Money

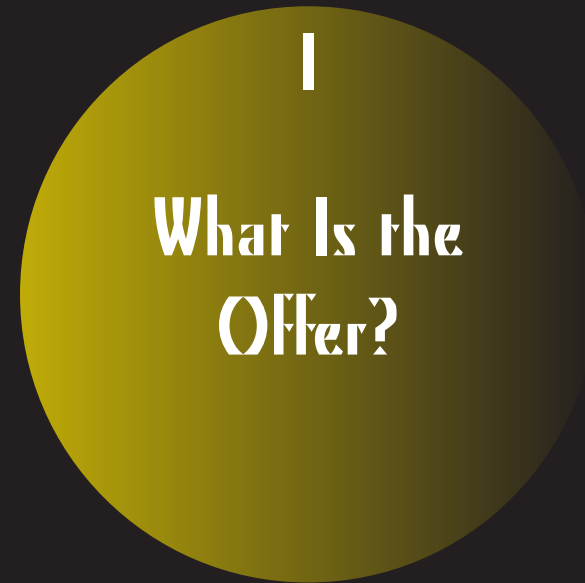
The last thing you want to do is fund a flawed radio commercial. It's like trying to build a house with poorly designed architectural plans. It's destined to flop. Naturally, you want your radio investment to pay off in terms of a) creating more/new client/prospect leads, b) positively establishing your branding, and c) generating more revenue for your company, directly attributable to your radio campaign.

Every client is different, every market is different and every radio commercial must reflect the unique characteristics and qualities of the client, the message, the selling proposition and ultimately the capacity of the radio commercial to connect with, and command the attention of, its intended audience.

The 24 Tips in this book come from more than two decades of experience in the worlds of advertising, marketing, public relations and media with a heavy emphasis on radio commercial script writing and radio commercial production. Moreover, this experience includes an impressive array of clients and businesses, large and small, whose radio advertisements have aired locally and nationally in markets across the country that have generated literally tens of thousands of consumer responses.

What is the company's established unique selling proposition for the commercial to be produced? (See #2, #24)

"The Offer" is the "trigger" that motivates the consumer to "act now." For example, a special promotion, a new product launch, a holiday/weekend special, a deep discount, these "special or limited-time offers" provide a sense of urgency to the listener.





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# What Is the Goal of the Commercial?

“Direct Response” or “Branding”?

Branding or sales? There can be, and generally is, a difference between these “types” of radio commercials. Reinforcing brand awareness and securing brand loyalty can be one approach while maintaining or increasing/improving market share.

Or, alternatively, the other approach is “direct response” advertising, which seeks to make the phone ring right away, increase leads and sales. This approach is focused on creating revenue in the near term. These two concepts don’t have to be mutually exclusive, but there is a very fine line to walk in the writing/creative of these two approaches.

Fortune 100 or even 1000 companies have the luxury of “brand advertising,” SME’s generally don’t. SME’s more often are looking to make the phone ring, generate leads or develop store traffic and sales right away. There is a huge difference between the concepts behind both approaches.



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## Age of the Company?

A “new” company’s message is, or can be, [very] different than that of a mature company. The need to create/develop “credibility” varies depending upon the product or service being offered.

For example, in the eyes of a consumer, the credibility of hiring a lawyer or some other type of professional is different, to varying degrees, than that of selecting a service provider. There are of course exceptions to this concept. As an air conditioning company, plumber, electrician, or other vocational-tech operation, for example, who has been in business for “20 years” or is a “multi-generational family that has been serving the community since x,” has the ability to leverage “that fact” into a marketable or promotable feature in a radio commercial. Whereas, by comparison, a “new entrant” into the market – professional or service provider, will not have that ability and will need to develop a way to overcome that shortcoming, potentially viewed as a liability. There are numerous ways to accomplish this, the critical marketing /media minutiae of which is outside the scope of this book.

Is there an “established brand,” or is this radio campaign a first time effort, part of a longer term strategic plan, a brand/line extension or possibly even a “market repositioning”? (Note: while this seems similar to #3, with some conceptual overlap, it is in fact different).

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## Established Brand?

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## Local, Regional, National Company?

Where the spot(s) run(s) has implications on voice talent and dialect. It even impacts on music choice, (see #14.) A national company advertising on Sirius XM for example, with its coast-to-coast coverage, has a direct impact on voice talent and music choice.

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## Location/ Geography?

Where is company located? Dialect, accents and niche cultural issues must be considered. Getting someone to “go to a store” (a local function), is considerably different than [trying to] get someone to “go to a website,” or “call an 800 #.” (Note: the actual “physical location” of “the company” may be irrelevant as the product/service may be “call center” centric, but variables such as voice talent and music remain valid and critical.)

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## Seasoned Spokesperson

Is there a “voice” of the company and if so, who is it? Often times the “president” of the company wants to be the voice talent. This can be a sensitive issue, as the president’s voice may not be suited, or ideal for radio. Sometimes this can be a good thing, other times perhaps not so much. For example, Jimmy, the spokesperson in the ‘Zyppah” commercial is the quintessential voice talent/spokesperson with his borderline caricature Boston/Jersey/ New York accent. No one else could do what he does – his “voice” is (becoming) synonymous with the brand; instantly recognizable and ideally suited for his company and product. But, this is the exception, not the rule.

Has the President or other C-Level executive(s) ever served as the “spokesperson” or “voice” of the company? Do any of these “officials” have a discernible accent or dialect? If so, this may or may not play favorably. A company “president” or “spokesperson” may or may not be the best choice; the answer: it depends. Local spots, maybe. National spots, maybe not.



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## Does the Company Have a Media Presence?

If so, what type of media presence and how long?  
Are there cross-marketing considerations or the leveraging of other “public voice” opportunities?

Male/Female? Young, Old? To whom is your product/service being marketed? Age, sex, income, must be factored into the equation. This matters for important reasons. One is that it influences exactly how your spot is both written and produced. Issues such as “age” sound and range of the voice talent must be considered. Whether to use male or female voice talent is a function of product/service variables. Some product/services are clearly better suited for gender specific voice talent than others. In cases where “male or female” voice talent may not appear to be as logically relevant, one option is to cut the spot two ways, read by both male and female, this is not an uncommon approach. Bonus: this is a good technique anyway for “mixing it up” and getting more leverage/use out of one written spot. The age/sex will have an impact on decision of what music and/or sound effects to be used in the production of the commercial(s).

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## What's the Demographic Target?

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## Has the Market(s) Been Identified?

Perhaps you're a regional advertiser looking to launch a new product/service; where you launch (specific markets vs. regional advertising) impacts the nature of the message, the tone of the message, how the spot is written and how the spot is produced – again - music, voice talent, dialect, all these variables are important factors.

This is critical as it specifically sets the stage for your audience demographic. There are many radio station choices in most markets. Radio stations and their programming and format(s), whether “music” or “talk” are created and designed to appeal to a specific segment of the total population in terms of gender, ethnic composition and socio-economic variables.

The identification of “radio stations” falls to some degree into a category called “Media Buying” which is covered in a separate companion article, a link to which is located at the end of this article. Suffice it to say though, while writing your radio commercial, you should know on what type of station(s) your radio commercial(s) will run as the writing and production must be carefully tailored to resonate and appeal to your targeted audience demographic.

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## Has the Radio Station(s) Been Identified?

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## Local Market?

A spot for a “local” market may very well be different than a spot for a national audience. This may (and most likely will) be reflected in voice talent and music choice. (See # 10, #11.)

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## Voice Over Talent

Male/Female? Company product/service may dictate which to use. Feminine Products – female! Unisex type products or services that are not “gender specific” may use either male or female. Age of talent, sound of voice is a function of product, service and prospect’s demographic.

Maybe yes, maybe no. Depends on product, station and message. Type of music? Depends on market, product and demographic of your audience, as well as radio station and station format. For instance, talk news is different than a “top 40 station” and may dictate what to do. Music for the full run of the commercial, or partial? Depends. Music change during commercial? Once again, depends. These are some of the issues that a seasoned professional producer considers. Frequent mistakes in music selection include music with horns, trumpets, loud drums or other musical composition that is a

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## Music



distraction to the wording and messaging of the spot. What you don't want is music to compete with, or impede the listener's ability to clearly hear the message – the carefully chosen words. Music that is incompatible with the message, the market and the station(s) are common and significant mistakes that negatively impact (and reduce) consumer response.



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## One Spot: Two Voices?

Yes, this is possible and sometimes recommended, depending upon what radio station(s) may be part of the radio buy. Sometimes an “announcer introduction and/or close can be used in conjunction with the company president or some other “voice of the company.” Dual voice spots are effective, but the decision is in the hands of an experienced writer/producer. Spots where there are “two people speaking” as though they’ve met on a street, in grocery store, standing in line at a bank, or friends sitting on a couch, or in a house, just “having a conversation” are usually heavy handed sales points masked by weak efforts as casual dialogue. These “friend exchange” spots can be pulled off successfully, but only with a deft hand, light touch and experience, or they come off sounding somewhere between stilted, silly, and worse, contrived.

Two station buy for a “local market” generally covers the market adequately. But certain products/services might require a wide(r) reach of the local marketplace.

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## One Station or Two Station Buy?

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## The Script

Who's writing your radio commercial script? Everything starts with the script – it is the most important part of the process. The idea, the message and the construction of the spot intellectually is critical to the success of the radio commercial(s). The way to view the script and the script writing is as follows: Your Company is “funding” both the production of the radio commercial and the media buy based solely on the relevance of the writing of the commercial. Period. Therefore, for you to anticipate any success, at all, for your radio campaign, the radio spot, the words, the concept, the production all have to be as carefully and intelligently written and professionally crafted as possible, otherwise you are funding a flawed or faulty radio commercial from the get-go. This is generally where the first and biggest mistake is made by novice entrants into the world of radio advertising. Bad script writing is at the top of the list of reasons why (many) radio commercials and therefore the campaigns do not work. Yes, station selection and announcement frequency are important but they can't overcome a flawed commercial.



Answer: It Depends. Considerations are: type of product, company size, local, regional or national ad buy and length of run. 1 month, 3 months? More? How many interesting and/or worthwhile facts are there about your company, or about the problem your company's product or service solves for the consumer? These variables can, will, or should dictate how many spots it is necessary for your company to have. An experienced copywriter and radio commercial producer can help you fashion these variables into intelligent copy and develop a suitable number of well-crafted radio spots that appropriately conveys your message over the anticipated run of your radio campaign and media buy.

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## How Many Spots Should You Have?



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180 Words

The general rule is that 180 words are the total number of words contained within a 60 radio commercial. In a properly written and produced spot, the “close” or “call to action” generally takes the last 10 to 15 seconds of a radio spot – enough time to summarize the offer and include phone number and/or web address. The close is approximately 45 words. That leaves approximately 135 words for your “sell” copy.

Please note, this formula follows a more Direct Response type of approach. Branding is an entirely different matter and does not necessarily incorporate a “hard close to make the phone ring” or seeking some other type of consumer behavior, action or reaction.

Other variables that impact on word count include: general read pacing, type of commercial, branding or direct response, music, a single voice direct-response read can accommodate more words, than for example a multi-character spot with sound effects etc.





What does that mean? Well, in radio it's different than what you might think. For example, an endorsement generally means that a "spokesperson" is "recommending" your company's product or service. In the "radio world" it's not exactly like that. It is common for clients to be charged a premium to have a recognized "voice talent/personality" voice their commercials. However, this does not mean that the talent is actually saying "and so and so is the best product or service, I use them, they are great, you should use them too." It is more subtle, more like an inferred endorsement.

A true "endorsement" can be available, but it also comes with an additional cost. For example, Howard Stern or Rush Limbaugh, or a local radio personality or other similar high-profile personality may simply "read" your commercial copy (and by the way, there is a difference in cost between a "Live Read" and a "Pre-Recorded" read – see immediately below, tip #21), but they won't, as noted above "necessarily" be specifically endorsing the product or service. Regardless, there is a premium cost for the talent to "read" the commercial. More about this below [#21].



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## Live Reads vs. Pre-Recorded Reads

What's the difference between a "live" read vs. a "pre-recorded read?" When a "voice talent/celebrity type" personality actually reads the client script live on air versus "pre-recording the same script" and then running that pre-recorded spot in the commercial break block. Be aware, there is frequently a cost difference between these two types of reads. The "live on air read" is more costly than the "pre-recorded read." Be reminded, while radio stations are fond of calling this an "endorsement" read, it actually isn't, but that's what they call it. You may be able to get an "endorsement read" (where the voice talent actually says directly or intimates that they "use the product/service and think it's great and you should too," but that most often comes at an extra cost.

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### Station Writing & Production vs Independent Radio Writer/Independent Producers Production

With the contraction of the “radio industry” – corporate takeovers, consolidation, mergers, show syndication and the leveraging of talent across multiple markets, fewer people are doing more work – from account executives to “creative staff” and even “on air talent.”

This means that less time is spent on writing and producing radio spot(s) for each client.

*[Note: National companies, or frequent advertisers spending significant sums of money on radio advertising often have their own ad agencies writing and/or producing their radio spots which are then sent to the radio station by the agency. Some radio stations may offer “value added” elements to a prospective client when pitching a proposed radio buy such as “free script writing and “free production.” A prospective client may find this attractive, and on the surface it sounds like a good thing. This tactic is often used as a “close” by a radio station rep to secure a sale but may not necessarily be the best way to go since the station is not able to spend the time and effort to produce a superior commercial.]*

“Free” sounds good, but it can be the most expensive radio mistake you, as a client, will ever make. Why do you think radio stations offer “free” writing and production? It’s because it is an enticement to purchase the time. Radio stations make their money on what a client spends on the actual cost of the radio buy. It’s the same concept as giving away the razor so the consumer later buys the razor blades.

The flaw in this “free radio commercial scenario” is that poorly written spots don’t deliver optimal results. This scenario falls into the category, “you get what you pay for.” A novice to the world of radio (writing, production and media buying) may have no gauge, benchmark, or experience to properly evaluate the quality of the writing of the script, the quality of the production or the true understanding behind the actual media buy. The radio station’s primary interest is in selling the air time, not the production of your commercial. More often than not, the radio station rep either shows up at the client’s office with the radio commercial, or plays it over the phone. And that’s that.

While it may be logical that a radio station should want to write and produce the “best possible spot” for the client, on the surface, that makes sense. But this is simply not the case. It would seem obvious that it’s in the radio station’s best interest to ensure that the spot is good so that the client receives excellent results. The goal of course is that you, the client, renews the ad buy. However, unfortunately, this is most often not the case because the person writing your radio spot may be the radio rep, it could be another on-staff person who has literally dozens of spots to write either that day or it could even be the on-air talent.

Allowing the radio station to write and produce your commercial is not always in alignment with taking the best approach in research and due diligence on behalf of your company, when seeking to create the most effective radio spot. Will the station devote the time, thought and effort to write and produce a compelling, relevant commercial? Remember, you the client, are planning on committing thousands of dollars a month to this radio spot. The question is, is this the best radio spot that can be written for your company?

There is tremendous “client churn” in the radio business due in large part to poor response to the commercial message. The copywriting scenario outlined above frequently, if not always, yields a dissatisfied client. A client that a) does not renew their ad buy and b) has had a bad experience with radio advertising, and c) forever believes that radio advertising does not work and is a waste of money may be placing blame wrongly; the station delivered the message to its thousands of listeners BUT the message was not compelling.

The success of any radio campaign rides exclusively on three things – a) the quality of the radio script writing, b) the actual radio commercial production (taking into account all the elements expressed above) and c) the nature of radio media buy.





Radio station websites fall into the category of “Added Value” Marketing Channel. Radio stations, like most media across the board, are feeling the impact of the internet, the myriad fragmentation and ever-expanding media choices clients and consumers alike can choose to use. In an effort to combat this, almost all radio stations have a website and stream their programming thus adding an additional audience to your schedule. Offering clients exposure on the station’s website can be a useful addition to a radio station media buy.

Radio station websites are intended to further “engage their listeners,” create more “fans” and aggregate a mailing/customer/database. The website, along with their database, can be leveraged for “value added” opportunities: Banner ads, on-air promos or events that cross market and promote events on the radio station’s website and the clients’ website. Radio stations often have outbound marketing efforts, newsletters or other web/email based marketing initiatives that can also be bundled into a radio buy at attractive rates.

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## Radio Station Websites

What is it you want the listener/customer/prospect to do? There are traditionally various actions or behaviors you would like the listener to engage in.

They are:

A) Call a number.” This is generally an 800 # or could be a local number. Either way you’re asking for a phone response.

B) Go to a website or a “lead/splash” page so the consumer can “see more about your company, product/service.” Once there they can call to “order something” or “inquire further,” or “sign up” for something so they will hopefully opt in for you to phone them, send them emails and/or SMS text messages.

C) Go to a store – a real brick and mortar location (this can be a “retail” oriented proposition, from restaurant or shoe store to a movie theater, bowling alley or car dealership) – the point is, your message is designed/intended to “get the consumer to go somewhere and buy something.”)

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## The Call to Action

## My Radio Commercials Have Been Scripted, What Now?

In addition to the “writing and producing” aspect(s) of your radio commercial, or multi-spot campaign, the next step is the actual placement of a media buy. The three key variables to a successful radio campaign and are of equal importance: 1) the writing of the radio commercial script, 2) the production of the radio commercial script and 3) the placement of the radio spot on the right combination of stations. These elements are inextricably intertwined, you cannot have a successful radio campaign unless there has been great care given equally to each of these elements.

The best written radio spot and creatively produced but aired in a poorly placed schedule is destined for failure. This equals wasted money and deep dissatisfaction. The chances of you and your company using radio again is likely slim to non-existent. The smart radio buy that matches your company’s product/service with its suitable demographic is part art, part skill with the chances of greater success attainable through the use of experienced and successful experts in radio commercial copywriting, radio commercial production and media buying.



In fact, media buying is a highly-specialized expertise in itself, so much so that it is covered in the companion to this EBook, “Radio Media Buying: Matching My Message to My Market.” You can download this article [here](#).

## Final Thoughts: Should You Write and Produce Your Radio Spots, or Should Someone Else?

As noted at the beginning of this article, as you can see, there’s a lot to think about when considering using radio advertising. At this point you’ve seen how many variables can go into the crafting of a radio script, the production of a radio spot, and ultimately the identification of the right radio station(s) whose audience best matches your company’s product/service demographic.

## Professional Radio Writing and Radio Production Assistance is Available for You

The question is, at this point, after having reviewed the numerous variables and complexities involved in writing and producing radio commercials, should you write and produce your company's' radio commercials, or, should you have a professional do it? Certainly, you can do it yourself. But why would you. Would you represent yourself in court? Would you diagnose your own medical condition if you're not a doctor? Can you drive a race car the way a professional does? Can you do your taxes better than a CPA? The answer is likely "no" to all of these questions, so why would you gamble a lot of money and possibly even your company's future on creating a radio commercial and placing a radio campaign that you essentially have little or no experience with? Radio commercial writing and radio commercial production success can only be achieved through years of experience.

If you would like professional assistance in helping to make your first, or next, foray into the world of radio advertising, we'd be delighted to see how we can be of assistance to you and your company.

Jeff Mustard, President

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## About Jeff Mustard

Founder and Creative Director – [www.TheRadioProducers.com](http://www.TheRadioProducers.com)

In addition to serving as the creative force at the core of The Radio Producers, an award-winning writing/production company, Jeff Mustard has extensive experience at the highest levels of advertising, marketing, public relations and broadcast communications.

The co-author of a Wall Street Journal best-selling book, Jeff Mustard is also an award-winning documentary writer/producer/director. His writings, essays, news articles and magazine feature stories have been published and produced in print, radio and television, locally, regionally and nationally. He was the head writer for a nationally syndicated television series, has scripted and produced countless sales, marketing and promotional videos and was the former president of the South Florida Screenwriters Guild.

His creative talent and strategic marketing approach have served him well as Director of Communications for multinational corporations as well as spokesperson for high-ranking members of government at the Gubernatorial, White House and United Nation's levels.

