

Buzz Worthy

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Wine Liquor Lotto

Ellen C. Wells



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I grew up on Long Island in the 1970s, and, like a lot of kids my age, I watched a lot of television. On the weekends the TV was often on Channel 11 WPIX, a local New York City station (and one of just a half dozen or so stations we received) that aired poorly dubbed martial arts movies on Saturday afternoons and Abbott and Costello movies on Sunday mornings. To this day I love both of those genres and lament the fact that weekend television is now straight-up infomercials.

If you think local television commercials are a bit corny now, just remember back to the local commercials of the 1970s. Do any of you Tri-State area folks remember Crazy Eddie ("His prices are IN-SAAAAA-NE")!? Or, the very classic Carvel commercials with the gravelly voiced grandpa (Fudgie the Whale is still my birthday cake of choice)? These commercials and characters are seared into my brain for life.

Another thing that is seared into my brain for life is the slogan used by the New York State Lotto during that time. Used on broadcast television, radio and print advertising, it seemed like I was constantly bombarded with the phrase, "You can't win if you don't play." If you think about it, that slogan is the absolute truth. How could you win something—anything, the lottery, Monopoly, your JV softball game—if you don't get yourself in the game? Dare I say the New York State Lotto provided me with a valuable life lesson? I will, on quite a frequent basis, pull out the phrase as advice for friends and relations while discussing serious matters. It's simple, it's memorable, it has an air of confidence. It's a truth bomb. It's a slogan that is Just. That. Good.



I traveled to Long Island for a visit with Mom just a few weeks ago. Heading from Boston, I take the ferry from Connecticut to the easternmost point of the North Fork and drive from there. It's mostly country homes and fields, with the occasional roadside strip mall. I was passing one such strip mall when a small sandwich board-type sign caught my eye. It read, "Wine Liquor Lotto," one word stacked on top of the other. It was nothing fancy. The sign had a white background and the lettering had that simple font of slide-in-sign lettering. That was it. But the sign struck me as the informational equivalent of the "You can't win if you don't play" slogan. It said to me that the fine establishment within that strip mall had the confidence that they could provide everything you needed, if in fact you were seeking wine, liquor and Lotto tickets. The sign was simple, memorable, confident. And if your truth was to seek out

any or all of those three items listed on the sign, they could help you fulfill it. Or, maybe the word “Lotto” just triggered something for me.

As marketers of our businesses, sometimes we get wrapped up in the clever. We fill our marques with sayings like “Sometimes I wet my plants” or “We don’t carrot all.” I’m all for clever, certainly! In fact, I (attempt to) make my living with cleverness. The effectiveness of a simple, confident truth bomb, however, cannot be overlooked. Just recall what sign Judy Sharpton declares the most effective she’s ever seen: “\$1 Beer at the Ferris Wheel” scrawled by hand with a marker. It’s what carnival visitors want and now they know how much and where. What are your customers looking for today? Tell them you’ve got it, simply and confidently. After all, you can’t win the retail game unless you play. **GP**