

# Let the Talent Be Talent: 10 Things You Need to Know About Live Endorsements

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Michael Berry

Talk Show Host

KTRH, Houston



HOUSTON – When I listen to Rush Limbaugh, I zone out during the commercials. Except, that is, when the “commercial” comes from Maha-Rushi’s lips. I’ve never heard anyone deliver a better live endorsement than El Rushbo. It doesn’t feel like advertising at all. He makes me feel it’s his personal opinion, which is why I tuned in to him in the first place. I want to know his opinion of Obama’s latest move, and I’ll listen when he tells me where to shop.

Clients pay a premium for live endorsements on radio. It has been my experience as a talk show host that they then sometimes do everything possible to undercut the effectiveness of it. So, here are my list of suggestions to ad agencies, sales reps, and yes, even clients (the people who pay our bills) as to how we, the talent, can get better results for you. Help us help you. To sales reps and talent: I wrote this in hopes you could send it to your clients, whether direct advertisers or ad agencies. Let me be the bad guy and this can be your conversation starter.

1. Don’t write a script. Any talent that needs a script isn’t worth the fee you pay for his endorsement. If all he’s doing is reading a script, have someone else read it. Hire a professional voice, or produce a better spot. Listeners can tell when a talent is reading your ad. You won’t get results. But if he uses your good or service and believes in it, you will get results. We can sell what we like because then it’s not “selling.” It’s simply sharing what we like and it’s what we do. Make sure your endorser understands you, the individual who owns the business. If you started the business out of your garage; if you are there every single day; if you answer when the phone rings to the main line, he should note that. People want a personal touch. He should share that you have it.
2. Let your talent be creative. Let him talk as he talks during his show. Let him be him. It is why his listeners tune in in the first place. If he sounds stilted, coached or restricted by your direction, he loses the credibility with his audience which is, after all, what you paid extra for.
3. Following on #1, make sure the talent understands your business. If he doesn’t understand what you do and what makes you special, he can’t convince his

listeners to use you. Bring him to your office and have him meet your people. Encourage him to ask for you, the owner, when he calls. Listen to his show and ask your team to do the same. Let him know you listen and share your thoughts on the show with him. Develop a true friendship and you'll reap the rewards. Make sure to have your staff listen to his show. If a listener calls saying, "Michael Berry told me to call you guys for my electrical needs," and your receptionist asks, "Who is Michael Berry?" you just lost a good customer.

4. Communicate with your talent. Let him know what callers are saying. What is making them call? The beauty of a live endorsement is that it can be tailored as you see things working. If a particular line he used spurred action to call, let him know. Let him know as soon as it happened so he remembers what he said in the endorsement. Telling him "the ads are working" is not real helpful. More useful are specific results like, "Once you told them I was a Marine, I started getting calls from Marines who wanted to use our service."
5. Don't require artificial tracking gimmicks. If you require me to "tell them Michael Berry sent ya" I will push back. That undercuts an endorsement by reducing the credibility. If you asked me for a recommendation of my favorite restaurant I'd spend 15 minutes extolling the virtues of it, telling you the owner's name, giving you their personal numbers, and telling you what to order. If I insisted you "tell them Michael Berry sent ya," you'd wonder if I was getting a commission or needed to impress the owner, both of which reduce the credibility of the endorsement.
6. If you insist on tracking the success of an endorsement, realize you will always undercount. When's the last time you saw a Chevy ad? They are one of the largest advertisers out there but do you honestly remember the last time you saw their ad? You see them constantly and at some point they've likely affected your judgment, but you won't admit it. Women don't mind admitting to others that they are "fans" of a host, but grown men won't. They'll never say they called your business because their favorite told them to, even though they did.
7. Remember that live endorsements are far more effective than, but very different from, print or TV spots. In the latter two, you have to differentiate yourself from all the other folks on that page or that station. With the live endorsement, the loyal listeners of a host are tuned in to him to hear his perspective, and what he says will have credibility with his audience. Don't position yourself in the marketplace by insulting your competitor or selling based on price. If he tells them you are to be trusted, they won't price shop or seek second opinions.
8. In order to ensure # 7 above continues, encourage your host to tell his audience to share with him how their experience was. Ask him to forward those responses. When you get these, make them right every time and ask him to share how you fixed a problem. This will go a long way in telling his audience they can trust your goods or services.
9. Don't think you need to keep changing the message. Get a good message and stick with it. Ad agencies often feel they need to justify their existence by changing copy points. No. Hell no. When you find a message that works, use it every time. There is churn of new listeners daily. Listeners don't need, for instance, a plumber today. But when they do – and they all will at some point – they will hear the same

message they always hear from their trusted radio personality and they will call. Changing the message confuses it. Find a good one and repeat it. No host is going to convince anyone to buy something they don't need right then. The best you can hope for is that when they do need it, they hear him say your name and they call. Based on that, you should get great results. Find a good message and stick with it. For years...

10. Don't measure talk radio based on ratings. This point is specifically regarding talk radio hosts. While music stations have higher ratings, typically, remember that the smaller audience of a talk host is far more likely to take action based on his recommendation. It's not total listeners you're seeking, it's total customers. If lots listen but nobody calls, you overpaid for underdelivery. The lower rate on a smaller audience that yields better results was a wise investment. Try the smaller talk radio show and you'll reap the rewards.

I hope this helps. I truly believe in the power of live radio endorsements by hosts who have credibility with their audiences. I've had success using these simple principles in my home market of Houston, as well as in the markets of my affiliate stations: Baton Rouge, Nashville, Portland and San Antonio.

*Michael Berry is a talk show host on KTRH in Houston, as well as in several other cities. You can reach him at [michaelberry@clearchannel.com](mailto:michaelberry@clearchannel.com).*