

Say It Until It Sticks



In 1936, Garnet Carter had a problem. He'd opened a tourist attraction at the top of Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga, Tennessee. It had a great view, impressive rock formations, even mini-golf, but no one knew about it.

Carter had bet big on American road trips, but it was the Depression, and he didn't have much to spend on advertising.

Carter kept thinking of how to advertise without spending much money. Then he got an idea. Maybe he could do all his ads with one guy and some paint. So he hired a painter named Clark Byers and handed him a map of all the roads headed to Chattanooga. He said, "Drive these roads and, when you see a good barn, offer to paint it for free in exchange for adding an ad message."

Byers got to work, talking to farmers, and painting "See Rock City" freehand in giant letters on the sides and roofs of 900 barns across 19 states. Even barns hundreds of miles from Lookout Mountain.

It was a win-win for the barn owners. They got their barns painted and then repainted every two years, tickets to Rock City, and even a branded thermometer and bath mat. The result: Rock City stayed packed for over 30 years.

If you drove southern highways then, you saw "See Rock City" everywhere.

Today, the closest modern version might be Buc-ee's billboards. They start hundreds of miles out and keep reminding you: "537 miles," then "325 miles," then "Next exit." The message repeats until it wins.

The bigger point here isn't about the cleverness of the message.

It's the repetition.

Think of those early road trippers. After the first "See Rock City," you don't think much about it. After the second, still nothing. By the third or fourth, the kids start asking. By the fifth or tenth, you ask about it at a gas station, and eventually you are promising to stop.

Say a Simple Message Repeatedly

It's the same with our messaging. We get tired of saying the same lines over and over. Often, we stop long before our message breaks through to voters.

Voters are busy with work, family, kids, school, and everything else that fills everyday life. You can't expect them to hear a line about the Pennsylvania budget once and remember it.

Ask yourself: what's our "See Rock City" message?

What's the one line you're going to say over and over about the budget? Make it easy to remember.

Something like:

Gov. Shapiro's got a Binge Spending Problem.
It's the largest spending increase in PA history.

You don't need voters to remember a dozen numbers. Repeat one or two phrases over and over. And when you are completely sick of saying it, that's when people are finally starting to pay attention.

The Bottom Line

The next time you talk about the budget, think about Rock City and what you'd paint on the side of a barn. Keep it short, simple, and repeat it until you're sick of hearing it.