

## **The Cure for the Common Headline**

If you were a neighbor of mine, you'd know what I mean when I say my lawn isn't going to win any beauty contests. It's so thin, brown and malnourished, it's embarrassing – especially during the dog days of summer.

So when The Scotts Company wrote to me recently about growing a thicker, greener lawn, its timing – and targeting of me as a potential customer – couldn't have been better.

After all, like any other proud homeowner in this day and age, I need to be doing everything I can to keep up with the Joneses, no?

Which reminds me of a direct mail package Scotts sent out a few years ago, bearing the words, "Now the grass can be greener on your side." While these folks didn't earn my business at the time, they did earn my respect, as the marketer in me was more than a little impressed with their use of a cliché as a headline.

Sure, a cliché (typically defined as a predictable, trite or overused expression) might not show much inventiveness and originality on the part of the copywriter, but it can go a long way towards capturing the attention of prospects.

A cliché is an expression to which almost everyone can relate. It speaks to something with which most people are familiar. Used in an unusual manner, or paraphrased, it can help you establish immediate rapport.

For instance, the Boston Sunday Globe once coined the headline, "Sunday Best," to promote home delivery of the newspaper.

Then there's Hoverspeed, a UK-based operator of high-speed catamarans, which issued a press release entitled, "Don't Miss the Boat."

Of course, Midas, the famous auto repair outlet, backs up its services with the tagline, "Trust the Midas Touch."

And in the aftermath of September 11, New York City launched its "Paint the Town Red, White & Blue" campaign, as a way of stimulating more tourism and new business activity.

But I haven't seen any other cliché worked over more often – albeit cleverly – in advertising than "The Cure for the Common Cold."

Just this summer, in the June 30-July 14 issue of Rolling Stone magazine, Triumph Motorcycles proclaimed its Rocket III, "The Cure for the Common Cruiser."

I'm sure Triumph wasn't aware that Nissan drew on an almost identical expression to help sell four wheels instead of two, heralding the 2002 Nissan Altima as "The Cure for the Common Car."

That would be a bitter pill to swallow, otherwise.

Usage of this prescription-related metaphor doesn't stop there, though.

Trade Secret, a chain of full-service salons, once promoted one of its products with the headline, "The Cure for the Common Curl."

Boston's Yale Electric Sales has advertised Casablanca, billed as the "World's Finest Ceiling Fan," as "The Cure for the Common Fan."

And in an attempt to distinguish itself from the competition, The Samuel Adams Brewhouse (also in Boston) has taken the same expression one step further, claiming it serves up "The Cure for the Common Cold One," adding, "We dispense six distinctive styles of freshly tapped Samuel Adams. For what ales you."

I think I'm coming down with a fever.

Finally, The Scotts Company isn't the only lawn care company to adopt a cliché and manipulate it to its advantage. While conducting research for this story, I found a cute, little classified ad for the Lawn Doctor, a company that really takes its name literally, claiming it offers "The Cure for the Common Job."

For those among the ranks of the unemployed, that might be, er, the last hurrah.