



## INSIDER EXCLUSIVES

### Misadventures in Advertising: What Message Are You Really Sending?

By Shebby Lee

I don't set out to make lists; I really don't. But sooner or later, despite my best efforts, my notes inevitably fall into categories that wind up as lists. Today's list might be called "Inept Advertising Phrases."

I may be oversensitive, but I'm proud of my chosen field, and it pains me when I see thoughtless and even ham-handed attempts to lure visitors to an attraction or region. On the other hand, I thoroughly enjoy creative and clever promotions for worthwhile ways to spend leisure time. Unfortunately, none of those are represented here. (Maybe another time!)

This past fall I spotted the following billboard-sized slogan just outside the entrance to one of our nation's wonderful national monuments: "Tourism is our business." I couldn't believe my eyes. What kind of a welcome is that to visitors to your region? It wasn't "We're glad you came!" or even "Welcome!" The people who put up the sign might as well have said, "We're here to take your money!"

I hope I'm not overreacting, but I have to admit it was a real downer. After all, "tourism" is a legitimate label for a valuable American industry. It provides 7.8 million jobs and is the only export consumed on these shores!

But what kind of message are we sending our visitors if we imply that our only interest in them is enriching our bank accounts? Giving this sign painter the benefit of the doubt, maybe these unfortunate words were intended to convey the attraction's experience. Oh, it's no use! I can't imagine what was going on in his or her mind, and, God forbid, an advertising agency had dreamed up that inanity!

Meanwhile, the other day I saw an email in my in-box that had this opening line: "Do you send tourists to [name of destination]?" I could just feel the hair on the back of my neck bristle. First, my clients are not tourists; they are explorers, participants, adventurers. Second, I don't "send" anybody anywhere. I take them. I share wondrous experiences with them. "Send" is what my mother did when she shipped me to my grandparents every summer. You get the picture. Words count.

Here's another one—while surfing the net, I found the website of a tour operator that had this message on its home page: "Welcome to my list of tours." Seriously? Not "Welcome to adventure" or "Welcome to the world of travel," or even the redundant "Welcome to my website." No, just "Welcome to my list." Astonishing.

Finally, if you get an email in your company's generic "info" box with the return address "Noreply," how seriously does its sender think anyone will regard it?

If you can't be more original than the above examples, please hire someone who will be. The alternative is too frightful to consider!

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