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Mottos can bring in the cash

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how they came to mind frequently is not.

Elizabeth Wideman thinks she was sitting in her car at a traffic light in 1984 when "Explore Our Space!" popped into her head. The command became the slogan for the Museum of History and Science, where Wideman is vice president of marketing and development.

"It was such a neat turn on words to be able to refer to space as in our building, a beautifully renovated 1878 Victorian warehouse building, and to refer to space as in our aerospace collection," Wideman said. "It also gave the impression of progress and the future."

On the other hand, George Owen, president of Media Marketing, knows exactly when and how he came up with the slogan for Country Boy Waterbeds, a Louisville-based chain he has represented for nearly a decade.

One Saturday about five years ago, he was grouting tile in his bathroom when he started to think of words that rhymed with "water."

"The only word I could come up with was 'oughter,'" Owen said.

One word led to another, and the rest is ... "If you ain't sleepin' on water, you oughter!"

Country Boy Waterbed's owners, Don Gibson and Phillip Logsdon, were not sold immediately.

"They weren't sure they wanted to sound that country," Owen remembered. "My point is, the place is called Country Boy Water Bed. There's no point denying that."

Now the slogan bubbles out of the mouth of a freckled-face character that appears on the company's letterhead, delivery trucks and signs above the doors of the company's 21 stores in Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi.

Owners of small businesses frequently hatch their own mottoes, as the late Russell Dages Sr. did in 1931 when he concocted "Dages for

Ages" for the paint company he started that year.

"It represents just what it says, lasting value on your paint," said owner Russell Dages Jr. "I don't think people have any difficulty putting two and two together."

People frequently comment on it, he said.

Periodically, the company tries to top it with a new one, such as "Dages Are Paint Sages," tested 20 years ago.

"Well, it just, uh ... it flopped," said Dages. "Whether people didn't know what the word 'sages' is — I guess that was it. ... Well, actually some of them said, 'What do you mean by that?'"

Yes, said advertising executive Knopf, wordplay can be so cute that outsiders will not understand it.

Short is important.

"The shorter, the more memorable," Knopf said.

The more memorable, the more likely it is that a prospective customer will turn to the company.

"What you're really going for is top-of-mind awareness," said Doug Gibson, president of Gibson, McKnight and Miller Inc., a marketing, advertising and public relations agency.

What about honesty?

"Hopefully, it will be accurate and true, but it's more what you would like the public to believe," Knopf said. "It's what you're trying to accomplish. I'm sure Sam Swope has plenty of people walk away, but they're hoping that nobody will walk away."

Emmett Gordon used to hang up signs touting the good food, the fine food, his Tangerine Restaurant served, but nobody bought it.

"Our business was so bad," said Gordon, who opened the chophouse on Woodlawn Avenue in 1941. "Sundays I was taking in \$3."

People drifted in for beer, mostly.

"I said, 'Oh, hell with it.'"

New signs went up around 1950.

"Worst food in Ky.," they said.

"People stop, come in to see us, see what's wrong," Gordon said. "It's worked ever since."

Sometimes it's hard to tell whether slogans pay off. In other cases it's clear immediately.

"Absolutely," said Owen, noting that Country Boy Waterbed spends more than \$1 million on advertisements just in Louisville, Lexington, Nashville and Memphis.

Country Boy Waterbed's jingle, he said, established top-of-mind awareness in Nashville and Memphis in six to eight months.

Liberty National Bank would not divulge its advertising budget, but a spokeswoman offered a clue to why the bank's slogan, which dates at least to 1983, has caught on. Between now and the end of December, prime-time-TV viewers will see a Liberty commercial perhaps 25 times a week.

At their best, slogans and jingles can entertain and amuse people while telling them about things they might like.

"They make it seem as if life can be exciting and adventurous, that certain kinds of decisions that otherwise seem ordinary are important," said Dr. Michael Cunningham, professor of social psychology at the University of Louisville.

The danger is that people may become prone to using slogans instead of explanations, Cunningham said. And cynicism sets in when higher quality or better service is implied but not delivered.

Cunningham is a good example. When he was about 6, he craved a particular brand of tennis shoes that supposedly would enable a kid to "run faster, jump higher."

"I got those shoes, and they didn't help at all, and I was sort of disappointed," he said.

That, he knows now, is a dilemma of the American consumer:

"How much do you believe of what you're told."