



Director's
approach

By
Jeff Jenkins

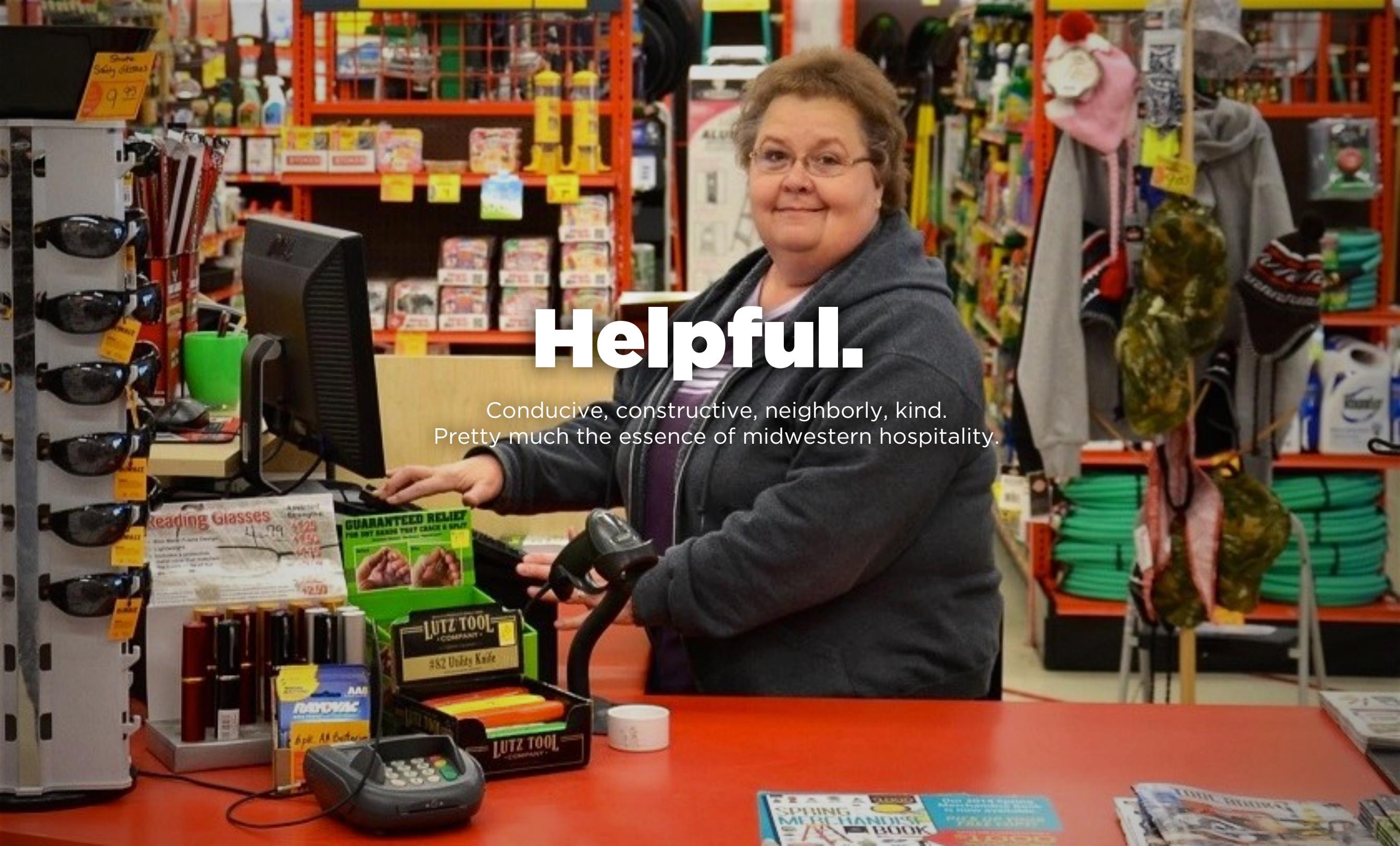
Ace & Me

Growing up in Michigan, there was an Ace a couple miles from my house. And every so often we'd be out and about and my Mom would announce that we were going there. Invariably, upon hearing the word Ace - and this happened **100% of the time** - my Dad would say, "You know... Ace is the place!"

The ads worked. He would proudly inject this slogan - every - single - time the word Ace came up. Even if it wasn't related to the store! As the years went on, it became funnier and funnier each time he'd say it.

So, you can imagine my sheer and utter delight at having the opportunity to carry on the tradition.



A woman with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a grey hoodie, is smiling at the camera while working behind a red counter in a hardware store. She is using a barcode scanner. On the counter are various items: a computer monitor, a keyboard, a green box labeled 'GUARANTEED RELIEF FOR DRY SKIN THAT CRACK & SPLIT', a black box for a 'LUTZ TOOL COMPANY 482 Utility Knife', a pack of 'AAA REMOVAC' batteries, a grey payment terminal, and a roll of white tape. To the left, a rack of sunglasses is visible. In the background, there are shelves stocked with various hardware products, including paint cans, boxes, and hanging items like a pink hat and a grey hoodie. A sign for 'Reading Glasses' is also visible on the counter.

Helpful.

Conducive, constructive, neighborly, kind.
Pretty much the essence of midwestern hospitality.

What are we doing again?

This work smartly and cleverly keeps a connection to a long running campaign, winks at it, and then remakes it into something fresh and original. We get that and will execute to build on it.

To me, these spots are about allowing sincerity and silliness to shine. They provide a deft setup / payoff conceit: a problem, solution and a gleefully unexpected jingle surprise ending.

The creative for these spots is top shelf. It's such a pleasure when the writing is so strong. So, thanks guys! My job now is to create a space that encourages the humanity and the humor to come across authentically.

The proof of concept videos are *very* funny and goodhearted - levity works to keep these videos charming. But comedy is delicate and it can't be forced. So instead of *trying* to be funny we will **diligently play** and in doing so find moments that are true and make us laugh over and over again.



Real.



Playful.

Narrative Beats

While each spot will vary a bit in structure - I see this as three basic beats.

We start with a real life problem. Simple and concise is best: “I don’t know where to start” “I want an awesome lawn” “I need a lightbulb.” The more succinct the problem the more relatable and honest it will be. Sometimes the set up works best as off beat and indirect as possible, “My father-in-law is in town” It’s a problem? Cue the plunger. It’s a problem!

Then the narrative moves along with a straightforward, upbeat response - the helpful part. This is the part the audience is expecting - the part Ace has been doing for years except this time there’s a hint of giddiness to it.

And the next part - my favorite part - is the payoff. The jingle and the portrait. On the surface it’s just an associate helping a customer set to a jingle. That. Just. Keeps. Going. It’s hilarious *and* informative. It’s the icing on the cake. There is a wonderful awkwardness to some of these. A realness. They are simple small moments but thanks to the jingle, they have a **big impact.**



Mischievous.

Casting

I want to leave as little to chance as possible. I'm open to using people who walk up to the store on the day, but I don't want to count on it. I want to use a casting director to work with the stores and help us wrangle folks who *want* to be involved. It's a big logistical hurdle and working with a bi-costal company like Liz Lewis will give us the resources we need to do it. I'd like to have folks shoot simple videos of themselves to tell us a little bit about who they are. With the employees (since they will be doing more heavy lifting) I'd like to either meet with them before we shoot, or schedule a Skype call to have a chance to get to know them more.

Instead of saying 'real people' I like to use the term non-professional actors. As much as we are trying to create realness and authenticity, there is artifice in this process and we want our cast to be onboard. I'll be looking for people who naturally play the part. A wide array of personalities who can listen, take direction, and most importantly have **a willingness to play along**.

The Ace employees should be more warm, charismatic and outgoing than their customer counterparts. They need to be people people. Fun people. I want to make sure they are knowledgeable about their craft, comfortable in their own skin and can think on their feet. When we see the casting tapes we will know instantly - they will make us smile or laugh.

For the costumers, I'd like to cover the spectrum. It's okay for these folks to be less comfortable with the camera. It will allow the associate to take the lead in the scene and give him or her the opportunity to put the shopper at ease and make the experience fun for them. Most importantly, we should have a representative mix of people. From the very normal and mainstream to more indie and odd and everyone in between.



Performance

My goal is to develop a personal and real connection with every person we work with. It's important that I gain their trust. I'll start by asking customers warm up questions to get them talking about something they enjoy and are excited about. We might even play an improv game here - a word association or finish the sentence game - a game with no wrong answers. Because on my set, **there are no wrong answers!** Once we are warmed up and having fun, we can talk about why they have come to Ace that day. The answers should be straightforward, lively and honest.

Now - because the employee interview is in the past tense, "I showed Bob..." I want to shoot the video portrait section next. Here's where we will play more games. The chemistry between the Associate and the Customer is paramount and it's more about creating a good natured interaction than a funny one.

That said, we will have loads of physical gags planned. Replacing the paint can, the extended handshake... Exaggerated movements and physicality will aid the comedic tone here. And we'll always try to add a small quip at the end of a pose or movement. It might be fun to actually sing the jingle off camera while they pose, so they know when to come in with a line. This section should feel silly, sincere and a little bit weird. We will all have a blast together.

Another game I had in mind was to tell the Associate things to do privately so that the customer doesn't know what's going on (i.e. on this take shake their hand and don't let go). The customer will have to look to the Associate to clue in to what is happening - we will get fresher reactions this way.



This guy.

Plan of Attack

I want to create a bubble of intimacy where our cast will feel at ease - a playground if you will. This means a few things. A small production footprint - few lights, small crew - which will make us agile and keep the set low key and relaxed. I want all the technical pieces to fall away from the talents' mind so it's just them. It's important that the crew working behind the camera is as friendly and positive as the folks in front of it. It will go a long way towards creating an atmosphere where people can open up and have fun.

I would love for one or two writers (improv specialists) to sit with me at the monitor '*inside the playground*' and for the rest of the gang to be out of sight in video village. Riffing will be important, and we will want to toss out ideas to our players in real time. I want to stay as **present** with our cast as possible.

A key for capturing great performances from non-professional actors is to be really sneaky about when we are rolling the camera. There's a term called 50/50 which signals the crew to start rolling but not say anything about it, no slate, we just go. We also have the fake cut, when everyone seems to relax and take a break but we keep the camera pointed and rolling. These two tactics help immeasurably for actors to be relaxed and perform naturally.

Beyond that, I'd like to shoot at least twice as many people as we need to maximize success. We want to be quick on our feet and malleable. That might mean changing things up, like swapping pairings and trying again.



Authentic.



Look and Feel

Now, I said that we weren't going to light very much, and we aren't. But that doesn't mean that it won't be beautiful. A DP who has both documentary and commercial experience will be right for this job. Someone like Jason Banker (who has shot a lot of my work) or Igor Martinovic (Man on Wire, House of Cards) who can blend naturalness with intimacy. I want these spots to feel fly on the wall, and unobtrusive. **But they can still look nice!** I want to find bright, colorful areas of the store to shoot. We will always find quirky, pleasing compositions that show off the store's assets.

I like to shoot on the easy-rig, which is like steady cam meets a handheld rig. It is stable and smooth but still gives you the realness and presence of handheld. Couple that with the light weight Arri Amira and a gorgeous cinematic zoom lens and we'll be off to the races. The image will feel rich and alive. We will follow the story and let the emotion of a scene guide the camera work.

I imagine the interviews to be nice medium close ups and the portraits to be pretty wide. Always looking for ways that the composition can support the comedy. We will shoot closer coverage for the portraits as well to cover our butts.

In and around the store, I want to keep things as natural as possible. We can have art department tidy things up, and we'll make sure the shelves are stocked, but I don't want to create anything overtly presentational (unless it's for comedic effect). Moreover, I don't want to spend time manicuring. I want to be shooting as much as we can.



Composed.

Fun.



We were made for this job.

For me, the tone of this campaign is right smack dab in the center of my wheelhouse. But we also have the perfect team. My Producer Dan Klein has deep roots in documentary film making. And of course Tom has the experience and class to keep everyone laughing the whole time (at him probably). We would kill it.

I love this job. It would be so fun to do.

Thank you so much for the opportunity,

Jeff

