

Trade Descriptions Apt

ADVERTISERS will go to almost any lengths to get a good slogan for their product, as linguistics expert Professor David Crystal can confirm:

Someone representing a shoe firm rang me up and asked if I could supply them with some words which would be good for selling shoes. "Adjectives?" I asked. "Yes," said a voice, a bit uncertainly—and then it asked, "How much do you charge for adjectives?" Well I thought it was a joke, one of my mates from work, perhaps, so I said, "£1.50 a dozen," and added, "I do a good line in nouns and adverbs, too." There was a pause. "I'll have two dozen of each," said the voice.

A couple of days later through the post came an order from a well-known shoe retailer for two dozen adjectives, three dozen adverbs, and so on—£10.80 plus VAT and postage and packing. I did the best I could and looked up some highly descriptive words which would do for talking about shoes, and sent them off. I never did find out if they were satisfied with the product, but they paid very promptly.

—*English Now* (BBC Radio 4)