

# Publicity and Advertising

by Jim Butcher

I sat on a stool in the cluttered laboratory beneath my basement apartment. It was chilly enough to make me wear a robe, but the dozen or so candles burning around the room made it look warm. The phone book lay on the table in front of me.

I stared at my ad in the Yellow Pages. It read:

***HARRY DRESDEN — WIZARD***  
*Lost Items Found. Paranormal Investigations.*  
*Consulting. Advice. Reasonable Rates.*  
*No Love Potions, Endless Purses, Parties or*  
*Other Entertainment*

"Flat, Harry," said Bob the Skull. Flickering orange lights danced in the skull's eye sockets. "It's flat."

I flipped through several pages. "Yeah, well. Most of them are. I don't think they offer raised lettering."

Bob rolled his eyelights. "Not literally flat, dimwit. Flat in the aesthetic sense. It has no panache. No moxy. No chutzpah."

"No what?"

Bob's skull turned to one side and banged what would have been its forehead against a heavy bronze candle-holder. After several thumps, it turned back toward me and said, "It's boring."

"Oh," I said. I rubbed at my jaw. "You think I should have gone four-color?"

Bob stared at me for a second and said, "I have nightmares about hell, where all I do is add up numbers and try to have conversations with people like you."

I glowered up at the skull and nodded. "Okay, fine. You think it needs more drama."

"More anything. Drama would do. Or breasts."

I sighed and saw where that line of thought was going. "I am not going to hire a leggy secretary, Bob. Get over it."

"I didn't say anything about legs. But as long as we're on the subject"

I set the yellow pages aside and picked up my pencil again. "I'm doing formulas here, Bob."

"It's formulae, O Maestro of Latin, and if you don't drum up some business, you aren't going to need those new spells for much of anything. Unless you're working on a spell to help you shoplift groceries."

I set the pencil down hard enough that the tip broke, and stared at Bob in annoyance. "So what do you think it should say?"

Bob's eyelights brightened. "Talk about monsters. Monsters are good."

"Give me a break."

"I'm serious, Harry! Instead of that line about consulting and finding things, put 'Fiends Foiled, Monsters Mangled, Vampires Vanquished, Demons Demolished.'"

"Oh yeah," I said. "That kind of alliteration will bring in the business."

"It will!"

"It will bring in the nutso business," I said. "Bob, I don't know if anyone's told you this, but most people don't believe that monsters and fiends and whatnot even exist."

"Most people don't believe in love potions, either, but you've got that in there."

I held on to a flash of bad temper. "The point," I told Bob, "is to have an advertisement that looks solid, professional and reliable."

"Yeah. Advertising is all about lying," Bob said.

"Hey!"

"You suck at lying, Harry. You really do. You should trust me on this one."

"No monsters," I insisted.

"Fine, fine," Bob said. "How about we do a positive-side spin, then? Something like, 'Maidens rescued, enchantments broken, villains unmasked, unicorns protected.'"

"Unicorns?"

"Chicks are into unicorns."

I rolled my eyes. "It's an ad for my investigative business, not a dating service. Besides, the only unicorn I ever saw tried to skewer me."

"You're sort of missing the entire 'advertising is lying' concept, Harry."

"No unicorns," I said firmly. "It's fine the way it is."

"No style at all," Bob complained.

I put on a mentally challenged accent. "Style is as style does."

"Okay, fine. Suppose we throw intelligence to the winds and only print the truth. 'Vampire slayer, ghost remover, faerie fighter, werewolf exterminator, police consultant, foe of the footsoldiers of Hell.'"

I thought about it for a minute, and then got a fresh piece of paper and wrote it down. I stared at the words.

"See?" Bob said. "That would look really hot, attract notice, and it would be the truth. What have you got to lose?"

"This week's gas money," I said, finally. "Too many letters. Besides, Lieutenant Murphy would kill me if I went around blowing trumpets about how I help the cops."

"You're hopeless," Bob said.

I shook my head. "No. I'm not in this for the money."

"Then what are you in it for, Harry? Hell, in the past few years you've been all but killed about a million times. Why do you do it?"

I squinted up at the skull. "Because someone has to."

"Hopeless," Bob repeated.

I smiled, picked up a fresh pencil, and went back to my formulas. Formulae. "Pretty much."

Bob sighed and fell quiet. My pencil scratched over clean white paper while the candles burned warm and steady.