

SPOTLIGHT on DRTV

MARKETING

M A G A Z I N E

Twenty-Four Tips for Dynamic DRTV

Or, how to ensure that your direct response spot makes those phones sit up and sing

Direct Response Television is hot. More and more advertisers, including a large number of blue chip companies, are using short-form DRTV and infomercials to market their products and services. That's the good news. The bad news is that a lot of what passes for DRTV is not

DRTV at all. They are more like brand commercials with a 1-800 number stuck on the end. That's fine for those who are satisfied with generating a couple of phone calls. However, for those of you interested in producing DRTV commercials that make the phones sit up and sing, here are 24 rules to making powerful, profitable direct response commercials and infomercials:

1. The more you tell, the more you sell: The most important thing to understand about DRTV is that each commercial needs to function as a complete, stand-alone sales presentation. That means that by the end of your spot, the viewer must have enough information to feel comfortable making a purchasing decision. It's your job to give them that information. That means presenting as many features and benefits, answering as many questions and overcoming as many objections as possible in the allotted time. Don't cheat yourself out of a sale by leaving valuable information out of your spot.

2. The product is King, Queen and Supreme Ruler: Don't waste a second of precious air time talking about anything except your product or service. Creative concepts that are not about extolling the virtues of your product or service are a waste of time.

3. Size matters: Forget everything you have been told about the tiny attention span of today's consumers. It's bull. Every test ever done shows that the longer your DRTV commercial is, the more effective it will be. That's why 60-second DRTV commercials outperform 30-second DRTV commercials, 120-second DRTV commercials outperform 60-second DRTV commercials, and infomercials outperform them all. If you can't do a better job of selling your product in 30 minutes than you can in 30 seconds, stick with general advertising.

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4. Focus groups will kill your commercial: Focus groups will happily tell you what they like or don't like about your DRTV commercial. Unfortunately, what they like or don't like in a commercial has nothing to do with what makes them buy from a commercial. Never confuse what a viewer likes with what makes them pick up the phone and buy. Save your money and skip the focus groups.

5. Show your product: TV is not a store or a showroom. The viewer can't reach up and squeeze the Charmin and then take that shiny new SUV out for a test drive. You're going to have to show me how beautiful and irresistible your product really is. And by the way, with a little imagination you can also "show" intangibles products or services, like long distance, financial planning or even political ideas.

6. Demonstrate your product: Beauty shots are critical, but the viewer also needs to see your product or service in action. Remember this: Dynamite demonstrations have sold more products than any other DRTV technique. They captivate an audience and fuel the desire to purchase.

7. Use graphics to reinforce key selling messages: Study after study has concluded that people understand and recall information better when they hear it and see it. Therefore, make sure that all the key selling points are also written on the screen as graphics at the exact same time as they are being spoken by the talent.

8. Include a powerful offer: It is not absolutely essential to have an offer, but keep in mind that a good offer can transform an OK commercial into a runaway bestseller. Offers work because they make the viewer think about the cost of not acting, and nobody wants to miss out on a great deal. The better the offer, the better the response.

9. Value is in the mind of the viewer: The effectiveness of your offer depends upon its perceived rather its real value. That is why so many effective DRTV offers include inexpensive bonus items that boost the perceived value of the offer.

(please turn over)

10. Talk directly to the viewer/buyer: I'm a big believer in dramatic re-enactments and good old-fashioned slice-of-life creations. I think they add depth and realism to DRTV commercials. However, they should never replace having someone look the viewer right in the eye and tell them exactly why they should surrender their hard-earned money to buy your product or service.

11. Say it again, Sam: After you have read this article, see how many of the rules you can recall. Then you will understand why repetition is so important in a good DRTV spot. If you want people to remember your key selling points, repeat them over and over and over again.

12. Be passionate: Passion sells. That doesn't mean you have to be loud, cheesy or over the top. However, if you can't get the viewer excited about what you're selling, you're going to have a hard time convincing them to buy. After all, if you're not pumped about your product and your offer, why should the audience get excited?

13. Be persuasive: It is one of the great injustices of life that no one sits down in front of the TV with their credit card, expecting to buy something. So, if you want people to purchase, you have to persuade them to do so. You have to convince them that your product really is as good as you say it is. You have to persuade them that their life is going to be more fun, more exciting and richer if they buy, and infinitely less rewarding if they do not.

14. God is in the details: You would be amazed at the number of tiny objections and misconceptions that can lurk in the viewer's mind, each powerful enough to derail the decision to purchase. Make a checklist of every possible reason someone might have for not making the purchase and try to answer as many objections as possible in the time available. In DRTV there is no tomorrow. If the viewer is going to buy, they have to buy now.

15. Reason to believe: If your product or service is better than everyone else's is, tell the viewer why. What is the science behind this product? What technical innovation or recent discovery has made this miracle possible? Give them a reason to believe.

16. Establish credibility: It is critical to establish and maintain credibility. This can be done through testimonials, studies or third party endorsements.

17. Testimonials work: Consumers respond to hearing other consumers talk about how wonderful a product or service is and how much they love it. Especially if they happen to mention how skeptical they were before they tried it. To find out how well testimonials work, just try doing a successful infomercial without them.

18. Endorsements also work: Third party endorsements, preferably from credible, respectable sources, also carry a lot of weight in DRTV.

19. Never give the viewer a choice: Consumers love choice, except in DRTV commercials. The reason is simple. As soon as you ask the viewer to think about whether they would prefer a red or blue car, guess what happens? That's right, they sit and think about it, instead of picking up the phone to buy. The viewer should only have one decision to make, and that is whether to call or not to call.

20. Ask for the order: Tell the viewer exactly what you want them to do, which of course is to call now and buy the product (or at least request more information).

21. The script is everything: If you haven't already noticed, DRTV is a scriptwriter's medium. If the script is written properly, using proven time-tested DR principles, the phones will sing. If the script is not written properly, your commercial will die a silent death.

22. Test, test, test: The only way to be absolutely certain what price point, which offer, which demonstration is best, is to put them on air against each other and compare the response rates.

23. Use problem/solution: Showing the viewer a problem they can relate to, and then showing how your product or service can solve that problem, is never a bad idea.

24. Minimize the viewer's risk: The lower the risk, the higher the response. Ways to lower the risk include guarantees and refund policies.

There you have it. Twenty-four rules for making phenomenal direct response commercials and infomercials. Do you need to follow each of these rules to ensure success? Of course not. There are many successful DRTV commercials on air that for one reason or another do not follow all the rules listed here. However, every rule you ignore decreases your chances of success, and every rule you follow increases your chances of success.

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