

SPOTLIGHT on DRTV

MARKETING MAGAZINE

How To Protect Your Brand (And Produce Great DRTV)

DRTV is about selling. A DRTV commercial must motivate the viewer to call the number on the screen and either buy the product or request information about the product (and buy it later). A DRTV spot that does not do this is a failure, no matter how clever, how creative and how beautiful it looks. That's why the first commandment of DRTV is **thou shall sell!**

However, how we sell our client's products and services is just as important as how much we sell. Most of the products and services we market will still be available long after those of us now busy marketing them have gone on to DRTV heaven. It is, therefore, imperative that we never sell in a way that diminishes the credibility of the product or jeopardizes its long term retail potential. That is why I believe that the second commandment of DRTV is **thou shall not violate the brand.**

Now don't get me wrong. I am not in any way suggesting that we abandon the time-tested techniques that have consistently proven effective in DRTV spots. Good demonstrations, powerful offers and benefit driven copy are, and always will be, the heart of any good DRTV spot. But there is absolutely no reason on earth that DRTV programs, short form or infomercials, cannot incorporate these techniques and still present a solid brand image. Yes, it is more expensive to produce these spots, but in the end, I believe it is the only responsible course of action.

Many companies already know this. Financial services, telecommunications and insurance companies have already implemented effective DRTV programs that still reflect their brands. **Sprint Canada, Direct Protect, Bell Canada, American Express, Yves Roche and Dell Computers** are just some of the commercials that jump to mind.

In the U.S. they have got the process of producing brand-based DRTV down to an art. Advertisers such as **Sony, Ford, Saturn, Apple Computer** and **Phillips** not only regularly use short form DRTV, many of them also use infomercials, while still maintaining brand integrity.

Despite this, there are still many advertisers, especially in Canada, who shy away from using DRTV because they are convinced it will somehow diminish their brand. That is a shame. As marketers, they are missing out on one the most powerful and effective tools available. And as DRTV producers, we are missing out on a vast segment of new business that could benefit from our services.

This is especially true with infomercials. The mere mention of the "I" word gives some advertising agencies and corporate marketers the jitters. Yet, infomercials are an extraordinarily effective marketing tool. This is evidenced by the fact that many of the companies who launched infomercials have continued to use them.

Think about it for a moment. What other medium gives you 28½-minutes to talk to consumers about your product or service? What other medium gives you the time to walk a potential customer through the benefits and features of a product, answer objections and introduce the viewer to other satisfied customers? What other medium combines the depth of direct mail with the persuasive power of television? The answer, of course, is that there is no other medium that can offer those benefits.

Infomercials work in part because, although consumers are overwhelmed by sales messages, what they really want is information – the information they need to make an intelligent and informed purchasing decision. Infomercials allow you to give consumers that information in the way you want it presented; in the way most conducive to making the sale. And it can be done without in any way impinging upon the integrity of your brand.

This does not mean that you can take all characteristics of brand advertising, graft them onto an infomercial and expect it to work. Many brand advertisers have tried that and it inevitably fails. Effective infomercials are always built upon proven direct response principals and you simply can't expect the same people who write and produce 30-second commercials to produce an effective 30-minute commercial.

However, that does not mean there is no role for traditional agencies in the production of infomercials. We have produced infomercials for many brand advertisers including **Sprint Canada, Ford Canada** and **General Motors** and all of them were done in partnership with the client's agency. Agencies possess a wealth of knowledge about their client's products and services. They understand production and most importantly, they are the "keepers of the brand". As such, they play an integral role in the production of brand-based infomercials.

If you have been considering utilizing DRTV as part of your marketing mix but have hesitated because of preconceived ideas about the medium, it may be time to reconsider. As a preliminary step, next time you are surfing your television, take note of at how many savvy marketers are now effectively combining the disciplines of DRTV and brand advertising.

You may be pleasantly surprised.



Ian French is President & Creative Director of Northern Lights DRTV, a Toronto-based DRTV agency.