

How to Write Irresistible Offers

Let's talk about offers! You know – those wonderful little enticements designed to make viewers jump out of their chairs and pick up the phone, like *"call now and with your new credit card and we will send you a brand new Ferrari! Absolutely free!"*.

There was a time when it was difficult to find a DRTV spot that wasn't built around a good offer. But these days, there are lots of (presumably) effective DRTV spots that contain no offer. In fact, I would go as far as to say that the majority of DRTV commercials viewers see today do not include an offer of any kind! No free info pack. No automatic entry into the Irish Sweepstakes. No free vacation in the south of France. No nothing!

So what gives? Have the rules of DRTV changed that much? Is an offer no longer important? Can you run a successful DRTV campaign without one?

First, let me state my prejudices. I learned DRTV from studying the work of DRTV short form pioneers like Al Eicoff and infomercial titans like Ron Popeil. As a result, I love offers. In my opinion they are the *piece de resistance* of a well executed DRTV spot; the final brick in a carefully constructed sales presentation; the last dramatic piece of evidence that sways the jury and closes the sale.

And I know from experience that even a "ho hum offer" will usually make response rates go up while a "dynamite offer" can fill a room with the beautiful sound of phones ringing. I also know, however, that it is possible to run a very successful DRTV campaign without any offer. I know because I've done it.

The fact is that successful DRTV commercials are a combination of several important elements of which an attractive offer is but one. If you have a great product or service, supported by a powerful demonstration and a good price point, you don't *necessarily* need an offer.

Banks, trust companies, insurance companies, telephone companies and automotive manufacturers are all big DRTV users but their spots rarely include an offer. Why? Well, there are several reasons.

First, they are all big brand advertisers whose products already carry considerable clout with consumers, thereby reducing the need for an offer to close the sale. Secondly, with these brand advertisers, the product often becomes the offer. *"Unlimited long distance in Canada for \$20.00 a month"* is a good product and a good offer! That doesn't mean the pot could not be sweetened with an additional offer but it does lessen the need to do so. Thirdly, for products like long distance and credit cards, the consumer is predisposed to using the phone to make the purchase so the extra inducement to get people to pick up the phone is less critical. Finally, brand advertisers sometimes feel

that having any kind of offer goes against the core positioning of a brand whose consumer equity is based upon the inherent qualities of the product itself.

Many entrepreneurial DRTV spots also choose to hit the air without an offer. There are plenty of successful infomercials on TV today that contain no special inducements to purchase.

So are the days of the offer over? Well let's hope not because the fact remains that, all things being equal, an offer will significantly boost response rates, and the last time I looked up from my computer screen, that was the name of the game.

Offers will never go away because they are based upon a simple, irrefutable psychological fact: everybody loves a bargain. And if you don't believe it, read Mordecai Richler's account of seeing George Bush at a souvenir shop in Kenya, surrounded by bodyguards, arms stuffed full of ceremonial masks and spears yelling, *"I'm the Vice President, don't I get a discount?"*.

Psychologists claim that being a good bargainer is the modern equivalent to being a good hunter. That may be true. All I know for sure is that most people find it hard to resist the allure of a good deal. A good offer leverages that compulsion to close the sale.

What makes a "good offer"? First, the offer should be as closely related to the product you are selling as possible. A free can of motor oil with every order of eyeliner isn't likely to send sales through the ceiling. Second, always remember that it is the *perceived value* of the offer, not its real value, that will determine its effectiveness. The higher the perceived value of the offer, the greater the response. A free car is wonderful, but even a free information package will do the trick if positioned correctly.

If there is some compelling reason why you cannot use an offer in your DRTV spot, don't panic. You may still have the ingredients for a successful program. However, if it's possible to include an offer that makes sense for your product, give it careful consideration. Offers are a proven method of raising response rates and lowering cost per orders.



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