

SPOTLIGHT on DRTV

MARKETING

M A G A Z I N E

Why DRTV Works

A lot has been written about the essential ingredients of an effective DRTV spot, such as the offer, the demonstration, the magical transformation and so on. Yet interestingly enough, very little has been written about exactly *why* these elements work.

I suppose that's understandable because you really don't need to know why they actually work to apply them effectively. I can attest to this fact because I wrote several successful short and long form spots before I really understood *why* they were working. Fortunately, I was saved by my own ignorance. I figured that since I had no idea what the hell I was actually doing, I should play the percentages and stick with what had proven successful for others. Ahh, the luck of fools!

However, although I now know a bit more about what works and why, I still play the percentages. I've learned the hard way that you reinvent the rules of DRTV at your own (and your client's) peril.

So why does DRTV work? Well, in my opinion, the effectiveness of DRTV can be attributed to one very simple premise: **DRTV works because it is a complete sales presentation.**

This is ultimately what separates DRTV from the world of brand commercials. Brand advertisers are brilliant at creating a mystique around a product. They are unparalleled in their ability to inspire and intrigue viewers. They delight in whetting the viewer's appetite, knowing that someone else will ultimately close the sale. As direct marketers, we don't have that option. We must close the sale ourselves.

Our commercials must capture the viewer's interest, convince them to stop watching TV, find a pen, write down an 11-digit number, get out their credit card, dial that 11-digit number and buy – sight unseen – our product or service. The only way to do that is to make our commercials complete, self-contained, irresistible sales presentations.

If one key piece of information is missing, one objection left unanswered, one benefit not fully extolled, we run the risk of not closing the sale. A DRTV spot must give the viewer *all* the information they need to overcome inertia and make that call.

Of course, making such a complete sales presentation takes time. Which, I believe, explains why 60-second spots outperform 30-second spots, 120-second spots outperform 60-second spots and why infomercials outperform them all.

Unfortunately, the idea that “longer is better” goes against what many of us have been taught about how consumers think and act. “*Everybody's busy*” we're told, “*keep it short and simple*”, “*30-seconds and they're gone!*”. Well, that may be absolutely true in the world of brand advertising, but it is fundamentally opposed to what we know works in direct response. As direct marketers, we know that if we take the time to clearly, carefully and passionately tell consumers about our products and services, they will take the time to listen.

How much time? Well, in addition to the usual crop of successful 30-minute programs, there are several Canadian charities running 60-minute commercials. And guess what? They work!

I know that some people find this hard to believe. I've met many marketers who still can't fathom why anyone would actually watch a 30-minute infomercial, yet alone respond to one. Nonetheless, the truth is that if the consumer is interested in the product you are offering, they will gladly watch a 30-minute advertisement. And on that simple fact rests the power and the beauty of direct response.

My advice to anyone writing a DRTV script is to go crazy! Put in everything anyone needs to know to be sold. If you end up with too much information for the time available, you can start eliminating. Obviously, a complete sales presentation should include key features and benefits, price (and the price of comparable products), how to order the product, when to order, (NOW! NOW!), payment options, guarantees, third party endorsements, and of course, all relevant product information.

In fact, when I'm writing a script, I try to think of the commercial as the television equivalent of an in-store salesclerk. It's my job to walk the viewer through the features and benefits, answer questions, anticipate and overcome objections and convince them to make the purchase. In other words, to give them a complete sales presentation.

In the next column – tips and tricks for sending response rates up, up and away!



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