

## Why You Should Always Test Your Creative

I am frequently asked about the best way to test DRTV creative. The answer is simple. Put the program on the air and see how well it works.

*“But wait . . . isn't there a way to test it before the expense of buying media?”* Unfortunately, no, there isn't. The only way to accurately gauge the effectiveness of a direct response campaign is to broadcast it and then analyze the results.

*“What about focus groups?”* Well, let me put it this way. If you chose to adapt your DRTV creative based upon information gleaned from a focus group, you will probably destroy any chance your program has of being successful. And the reason is simple. What focus group participants will tell you they like in a direct response commercial is not what makes them buy from a direct response commercial.

For example, people in a focus group will invariably say they prefer a commercial with a softer, rather than a harder, sell. Well, no kidding! We all prefer the soft sell. That way we don't feel compelled to act. We would also prefer that panhandlers didn't ask us for money on the street. But if they didn't, what are the chances we would go over and offer it to them?

The same principal holds true with DRTV commercials. No matter how many times consumers tell you they prefer the softer sell, the truth is that the enthusiastic sell always outperforms the softer sell. Always!

Here's another example. When you show a really good infomercial to a focus group, they will almost always tell you that the call-to-action, – that's the commercial within the infomercial that contains the price and the 1-800#, – appears too late in the program. But guess what happens when you move the call-to-action up earlier in the program? You got it! Response rates drop like bad stock.

Why? Because when people say they wanted the call-to-action to appear earlier, what they're really saying is that they wanted to find out how much the product costs so they could justify not watching the program anymore. What they don't tell you is that the longer you withhold the call-to-action and the price, the longer they will watch. And statistically speaking, the longer they watch, the greater the likelihood they will respond.

I'm not suggesting that people in focus groups deliberately lie. In fact, they are more than happy to tell you what they honestly like and dislike about every aspect of your commercial. BUT, keep in mind that what they would like to see in a commercial and what will motivate them to buy from a commercial are two very different things. Our job is not to produce DRTV commercials that consumers enjoy watching. Our job is to produce commercials they respond to.

Now, before I get calls from every research and focus group guru in the nation, let me make one thing clear. I'm a big believer

in research. In fact, when I'm preparing a DRTV campaign, I want all the research data I can lay my hands on.

I want to know everything good, bad and indifferent about the product I'm selling. I also want to know everything about the people I'm selling to. I want the basics like age, gender and income. But more important, I want to know what a customer thinks about the product I'm selling.

Even if the customer's perceptions are inaccurate, off-base and contradictory, which they often are, I still need to know what they're thinking. To make a good commercial I need to know what they believe the benefits of the product are, and what they like or dislike about the product, about us and about our competitors. I need to uncover those preconceived ideas that lurk in the customer's mind because I must diffuse those before I can even begin selling.

Diligent, disciplined, insightful research is imperative and without it, we would be lost. But its value lies in helping us craft the commercial. It is of no value after the fact and no amount of focus groups will tell you if your DRTV commercial will actually make consumers pick up the phone and buy the product.

The best way to do that is to take a good long look at your commercial and then ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I made a complete sales presentation? Have I given the viewer all the information they need to make a purchasing decision?
- Is the commercial exciting? Does it motivate the viewer to action?
- Are the benefits stated clearly and repeatedly?
- Is the product or service well demonstrated?
- Is the 1-800# on the screen long enough for the viewer to go get a pen, come back and write the number down?
- Have I done everything possible to minimize the viewer's risk by including all relevant information about guarantees, warranties and returns?
- Did I ask for the order?

If you can answer yes to these questions, you already have more information that any focus group will ever reveal. Now the only thing left to do is put your commercial on air and let the sales begin!



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