



BY NANCY MARCUM

## The Rules of the Media Game

I don't know how many times, over the years, I have received a commercial, short form or long form direct response, ready to test, and the format or content of the commercial was not in sync with the reality of what would clear at the station level. For instance, in the spring of 1999, the National Rifle Association (NRA) called my company with a request to purchase \$500,000 monthly only to find out that it was met with resistance, as many stations would not clear the organization's infomercial.

What you need to know is that there are over 70 cable networks and 1,400 broadcast stations selling infomercial airtime, and the truth is: They all have a variety of different rules and regulations to follow.

Recently, I moderated an educational seminar at ERA's Annual Convention in Las Vegas, and here is what the cable networks and broadcast station rep firms had to say:



### MYTH VS. REALITY

**1 Myth: Stations will air a program that looks like a news documentary or talk show format.**

**Reality:** You would be surprised. According to Chris King, paid programming team sales manager for Fox Station Sales, "We will not run anything that could be deemed as being a live broadcast, or that appears as though it's a new program potentially produced or reported by networks. Specifically in our guidelines from legal: *The infomercial may not mislead viewers as to the nature of the program.* For example, the infomercial may not attempt to disguise itself as a new program or documentary."

**2 Myth: Advertisers can get a show cleared in five days or less.**

**Reality:** Try again.

**3 Myth: Production values will ensure immediate clearance.**

**Reality:** Pretty pictures do not always open doors.

**4 Myth: Fortune 500 clients do not have to pay cash in advance.**

**Reality:** Look closer. "This is a classic case of a select few agencies/clients giving the rest of the industry a bad rap," says Todd Ackley, paid programming team manager for Viacom Television Sales. "Because of a few bad apples, most stations require cash in advance for long-form advertising despite the credit rating of the agency/client. The station may make an exception if there is a long history of on-time payments."

**5 Myth: Ingestibles will someday be banned from television.**

**Reality:** Send the backup.

**6 Myth: Product placement will take over commercial television.**

**Reality:** Trust the consumer. According to Chickie Bucco, president of KTVG Direct Marketing, "Although product placement is

talked about everywhere and many advertisers are using this strategy, I don't believe that it will have a negative impact on DR broadcast spending. The DR broadcast advertisers are generally looking for a more immediate response and product placement does not have to call action."

### **7 Myth: Buying short-form DRTV media will give me leverage in the long-form department.**

**Reality:** Never the two shall meet. Cari Camaris, manager, direct response at the STYLE Network, says, "Each campaign is evaluated on an individual basis. When a client has both long- and short-form components, we work together to create the best possible package in order to accommodate the client's needs. Short-form spending is not directly linked to long-form benefits."

### **8 Myth: Advertisers are incumbent to their monthly airtime packages.**

**Reality:** Stations have the right to bend the rules. According to Keith Minarik, account executive, paid programming at Oxygen Media, "I try to keep agency packages the same month to month. In my experience, however, I have found that packages can be fluid, depending upon the agency itself and the time periods in question. If there is a show that works really well in a specific day and time, I usually endeavor to keep them in the spot."

### **9 Myth: The IMS Top 10 infomercials and spots have all the good airtime.**

**Reality:** Someone's trash can be another's treasure.

### **10 Myth: Male enhancement products will not clear on our station.**

**Reality:** Never say never. Risa Rosenthal, vice president, direct response advertising for A&E Television Networks (AETN), says that the network "is very strict about the types of commercials [it] accepts. Advertisers must go through a two-

step approval process. First commercials are looked at from a quality perspective. We are looking to make sure a commercial is non-offensive, acceptable for all audiences and of high production value. Once approved for quality, commercials are then sent to our S&P department. Our legal team evaluates all claims and substantiations. At this time, the only male enhancement products that have made it through our approval process are those that have been approved by the FDA."

### **10 Myth: Stations like commercial content that fits their format.**

**Reality:** It's all about the money. KJ Lyons, president of Opportunity Media/Lifetime Television, says, "Large national cable networks such as Lifetime truly do value commercial content that is fitting with our brand. We have highly focused brand strategy and view commercial content as informative, viewer-service content. This has been reinforced by viewer feedback, particularly with regard to well-done, informative infomercials with great products."

### **11 Myth: With the onset of TiVo, digital video recorders and VOD, your commercials are doomed.**

**Reality:** Fragmentation is the forefront. "This would be if viewers only watched what they TiVo'd," says Paul Teja, vice president, direct market sales at ABC Family. "Having used TiVo for over a year, I know that's not the case. I watch much more TV that I don't TiVo, and see the commercials in real-time. There are only a select group of shows that I TiVo because they are in the time conflict to what I normally watch in real-time. Even with those shows I see the commercials, while watching the TiVo, even if it's [on] fast forward. Those that interest me I watch in regular speed."

### **12 Myth: New networks are launching and our audience is declining.**

**Reality:** Launch em' and leave em' vs.


audience loyalty. "A great number of networks have launched in recent years," says Lyons "This has supported the view held by some that the audience is declining and that fragmentation is increased. Captivating, original content will always generate an audience. Lifetime has done a tremendous job in developing original series and movies that bring in viewers. Our brand extensions in Lifetime Movie Network and Lifetime Real Woman have, in some ways, complemented the flagship Lifetime Network, but also developed new viewers. I believe we will eventually see a shakeout, where small, fringe networks will be consolidated or shutdown."

### **13 Myth: Rates go up 15 percent every year.**

**Reality:** Supply and demand can change the landscape. "Absolutely not—at least not from our standpoint," affirms JoAnn Levey, senior vice president, long-form sales for Paxson Communications/"i" Network. "Our rates are dependent on supply and demand. Some rates go up...some rates go down...some rates stay the same...Again, because we are so direct response focused, our rate structure is reliant on the feedback we get from our clients as to where the rates should be."

### **14 Myth: The traffic department can pull a show title in 48 hours.**

**Reality:** The norm is four to five days.

As you can see, the information above can be most valuable in your marketing efforts. Furthermore, you can imagine how the disappointed marketers would feel if they hit these roadblocks after the show has already been produced. Follow the rules of the game and do your homework before you begin production. 

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