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Why Infomercials?

By Nancy Marcum

In my 22 years in the industry, I've found that consumers and marketers have at least one thing in common: They love to make fun of infomercials. Yet walk into nearly any home in America and you'll likely find a Ronco Showtime Rotisserie in the kitchen, a Time-Life CD or DVD in the entertainment system or a Shark vacuum in the closet.

Television stations love infomercials, too, because those 28 ½ minute ads generate \$1 billion in media sales yearly, and all of it is paid upfront, unlike other forms of advertising. This popularity translates into incredible marketing power. Consider this: An infomercial can turn your unknown product into a household name in as little as six months.

In my own media-buying career, I have seen Susan "Stop the Insanity" Power become a cultural icon. The "Body by Jake" infomercials made Jake Steinfeld so recognizable that he had his own TV sitcom. Most recently, the "Gift of Guitar" infomercial has made Esteban so famous that he has his own Geico commercial.

Sure, search engine marketing is great for consumers checking out a specific product. But how many people wake up in the morning thinking, "I need a real estate audio program," or "I need a definitive collection of '70s soul music" or "I need to help feed hungry children around the world?" Here are suggestions on how to make this medium work for you:

Forget the stereotypes. You may think infomercials are great for weight-loss and kitchen

products but they could never work for you. Successes like Esteban's Guitar and the Little Giant Ladder prove that infomercials reach the young and old, men as well as women. Virtually any product category can be an infomercial success with the right approach.

Make the benefits the hero. The old direct response saying, "Make the product the hero," was a guiding principle when I helped produce one of the industry's first hits in 1984, "Get Rich with Real Estate." Back then, infomercials were the original reality TV, little more than on-the-fly product demonstrations. That saying has morphed



into overproduced graphics, big-budget productions and even choreography. Perhaps the rule needs to be changed to "Make the benefits the hero." Every moment of your infomercial must answer the question, "How will this product solve my problems and change my life?"

Capitalize on the interactivity. One classic knock against DRTV is that it's limited to one-size-fits-all offers. Wrong. There are financial companies specializing in creating custom payment plans for your customers – skilled telemarketers who can upsell or down-sell customers to a package that makes the most sense for the individual, and fulfillment companies that

can ship your products in infinite combinations of installment plans and options.

Integrate your infomercial with the Internet and other DM media. Infomercials drive millions of clicks to Web sites. The people who click from an infomercial come pre-sold and virtually ready to buy, something you don't get from a Google adWord. Have a custom landing page for these prospects. Then look at creative offers and upsells you can incorporate into your shopping cart to earn every penny. Before you start your campaign, be ready to follow up with prospects via mail, e-mail and telemarketing.

Build a brand you can take to retail. The ultimate goal of almost every infomercial marketer is to break into retail. Each airing of your show is a powerful form of advertising that literally pays for itself. Create a product name, logo and package design that play off the infomercial so your product is easily recognized at retail.

Be creative. Only 1 percent of people who watch an infomercial make the purchase. What if you could do something to raise that rate to 1.5 percent? What new category can you introduce to the medium? Two years ago, almost no one thought you could sell cars via an infomercial. Then someone got the idea to focus on selling the financing, and now dozens of dealers nationwide have successful infomercials.

Don't copycat. In today's supersaturated infomercial age, direct marketers don't compete on an island. If you're selling a product for joint pain, you have to remember that Super Blue has already been there. If your product cooks chicken, most of your prospects already have a Showtime Rotisserie. The failure rate of new infomercials is fairly high because there are so many copycats. If there has been a big infomercial hit in your product category in the past five years, now may not be the time for you to produce a show.

Infomercials are not a magic bullet. All the traditional rules of DM still apply. You must have a great offer and create sense of urgency. You must focus on benefits and problem solving. And you must prove your claims with demonstrations and testimonials. If you can do all that, infomercial marketing can become one of the most powerful weapons in your arsenal.