

HOW TO MAKE MONEY PRODUCING CABLE TV SPOTS

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If you have cable, you've no doubt seen local advertising on most of the channels. There are three ways a local business could produce a commercial. One, they could do it themselves (and we all know what that looks like); two, they could have the local cable business do it for them (which can also look quite amateurish); or they can have an outside individual do the production. This is where you come in.

If your video skills are top-notch, you can produce excellent commercials for local businesses at agreeable prices. If you have marketing skills, so much the better, but it's not an absolute requirement. As long as you can clearly answer the "4 W" questions (who, what, where and why), your commercial will be good.

The only drawback to this business is that you should use 3/4 inch broadcast format video, which is incompatible with a home videocamera. A camera for this type of videotape usually costs around \$3000, less if it's used. There is a way around this expense, though.

Most cable stations have what is called a "public access" channel. This channel is designed so that individuals and groups from the community can produce their own shows, to be aired on the channel. Contact your local cable company and find out if they have such a channel.

You should be able to rent time on their equipment. This is a real boon when it comes to editing a tape, as they will have the equipment necessary to make your tape look professional. They usually offer short courses on using the equipment, too.

Market your services directly to the small businesses in your area. Good prospects are auto dealerships, restaurants, retailers such as video, book, and computer dealers, and, in election years, local political candidates (hope they get elected - you can expect a return customer!). Your quality production, coupled with a reasonable price, should entice prospects to become customers.

Most commercials will be either thirty-seconds or one minute, and will be shot on location at the customer's facilities. If they provide the copy for the commercial, you only have to direct the commercial. Run through the script with whomever will be reading it, to make sure that it will fit the time without sounding rushed.

You want to aim for a relaxed, natural sound (unless, of course, you're working with your local crazy car dealer, in which case they may want an auctioneer sound!). Above all, make sure the script tells who the advertiser is, what they do, where they are, and why people should give them their business. This is what the customer needs to hear.

Likewise, make sure your customer is happy with the result. After shooting the video, edit it (you should be able to ask someone at the cable company to help you), then review it with your customer. As long as you've presented the advertiser in a good light, you'll be in good shape.

The first few times you produce a commercial, you may feel like you're flying by the seat of your pants. Just relax, use good common sense, and always remember that the job of the commercial is to convince the skeptical customer to spend his or her hard earned money with your client.

You should expect to spend a few hours during the shoot, to get enough takes for editing. Get four or five good takes. That way, any bad parts that you find when reviewing your taping can be replaced with a good take.

A 30-second or 1-minute spot can be shot and edited in one day. The first one or two may take a bit longer, but that's okay. It's better to take your time when learning the ropes, rather than rush through and end up with substandard results.

Because your overhead will be low (if renting equipment, instead of purchasing), you should be able to undercut your competition. In a decent size city, you can expect to charge between \$500 and \$1,000. Longer commercials are more negotiable, depending upon whether or not you will be asked to write the script. The half-hour long "infomercials" have become a bonanza for many advertisers, and they are a goal you can work up to, as your skills grow.

Watch commercials and listen to them. Keep mental notes about how the advertiser is presented, what message the commercial gives, and if you feel the commercial is successful. Incorporate the best elements of the commercials you see into your own shoots!