

WHAT IS AN INFOMERCIAL?

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TV-13.

WHAT IS AN INFOMERCIAL ?

The term infomercial refers to a very specific form of TV advertising. Let's break apart the pieces and identify the parameters and ingredients of an infomercial.

1. An infomercial is an advertisement.
2. An infomercial must be program-long.
3. An infomercial must solicit a specific direct response from the viewer.

IT IS AN AD. First and foremost, an infomercial is simply another form of advertisement. It is a commercial message, and as such represents the viewpoints and serves the interest of the sponsor. It is a "paid program."

IT IS LONG FORM. Unlike conventional 30 and 60 second TV ads, an infomercial runs at least a half hour. The reason: a half hour is the smallest block of airtime a TV station will sell without interrupting its programming schedules. (NO program on TV is shorter than 30 minutes.)

IT SOLICITS A "DIRECT" RESPONSE. An infomercial must solicit a response which is specific and quantifiable. The solicitation and the delivery of the response must be direct between the advertiser and the viewer.

Unfortunately, the term infomercial is not universally understood in the industry, and infomercials may be called different things by different people.

The list of official sounding names, from "documericals" to "long-form advertising" is "paid programming," is endless and can be confusing: some term do not adequately define the scope of this new form of advertising.

For example, the term long-form advertising seems to be a favorite among media people. Unfortunately, the term describes only the time aspect, disregarding purpose and content. Of course, it does reflect the focus of those in TV circles, as opposed to the broader perspective of those in the marketing community. What will become of the term long-form advertising when paid advertising program extend to an hour or longer? Will we upgrade the term to longer-form advertising and then longest-form advertising?

By contrast, the term direct response advertising is obviously of a marketing heritage. But like the former, the term is incomplete because it does not qualify the medium being used. Mail order is also a form of direct response advertising.

Finally, there are those who feel uncomfortable with the term infomercial because it sounds too gimmicky or colloquial.

We think otherwise. More and more companies are accepting and using the term infomercial, and because of that we feel it will stand the test of time.

WHAT ARE DRTV SPOTS?

The term DRTV spot as used in this report refers to standard length direct response advertisements that are aired within or between regularly scheduled programs.

Like infomercials, DRTV spots are designed to solicit a specific direct response from the TV viewers. Unlike infomercials, however, they are not program-length ads. Although standard length is usually one or two minutes, spots may run anywhere from ten seconds to three minutes.

Your product and the type of response you are trying to generate will dictate when DRTV spots may be more cost-effective than infomercials, and vice versa.

SOLICITING A RESPONSE: Infomercials and DRTV spots are both designed to solicit a specific response directly from TV viewers. What do you want the viewers to do? What do you want to get? These are the two fundamental questions your infomercial or DRTV spot must answer effectively.

Regardless of which form of advertising you use, certain rules always apply:

Be Explicit: Tell the viewers exactly what you want them to do. Some advertisers get so engrossed highlighting the fantastic features of their product, they bury their solicitation message and fail to stress what they want the TV viewers to do.

Be Direct: Solicit a response that is direct - and measurable. If your objective is to get the consumers to visit their nearest shopping center to look for your product, this is not direct response advertising/. Infomercials and DRTV spots require the viewer to respond directly to you (the advertiser).

Must Be Measurable: The response must be quantifiable. Even if you're running a simple opinion poll, the response must be something that can be measured in a way that defines the success or failure of either the advertisement itself or of the product being advertised.

LEADS OR SALES:

Infomercials and DRTV spots commonly solicit either a direct purchase or an inquiry about a product. Again, be explicit. don't give the viewer an option. If you do, your response mix will be inaccurate, confusing, and counterproductive.

LEAD GENERATION:

A lead generation infomercial or DRTV spot asks the viewers to call your toll-free 800 number and to leave their name and address to receive additional sales information about you product or service.

SALES GENERATION:

A sales generation infomercial or DRTV spot prompts the viewer to call your toll-free 800 number to place an order for you product or service, paying by credit card or COD.

STICK WITH A SINGLE RESPONSE OBJECTIVE; ANYTHING ELSE IS PURE WINDFALL.

Your infomercial that solicits viewers to make a direct purchase may also generate calls requesting additional information. Although these unsolicited calls must be treated as highly qualified leads, they cannot be used to measure the actual success of you infomercial. Since you principal objective is to generate direct dollar sales, all the calls that generated leads must be treated as windfall.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CUSTOMERS TO GO THE SHOPPING CENTER LOOKING FOR YOUR PRODUCT ?

As a rule of thumb, infomercials and DRTV spots are never designed to encourage retail sales. However, some consumers want to look and see a product before they purchase it. Others don't have a credit card or fail to note the ordering information provided in you infomercial.

This large contingent of potential customers can provide you with extra profits from retail sales generated by your infomercial or DRTV spot. An increase in retail sales of a number of products has been directly attributed to infomercials or DRTV spots. For example, exercise machines like the ThighMaster and certain types of sunglasses, like BluBlockers, have enjoyed increased retail sales due to direct response advertising by the aggressive marketers

of those products.

CREATING A TREND.

Direct response pioneers like The JuiceMan and The Juice Tiger sold truckloads of juice extractors with their infomercials. These two competing brands, however, did more than sell juice machines on television - they convinced consumers that juice was important and showed them how juice machines can help them lead healthier, happier lives.

Consequently, these infomercials helped the retail sales of almost every brand of juice maker. With their new awareness, consumers became receptive to the idea of owning a juice machine. Suddenly a product line that once collected dust on department store shelves became a top seller. Stores began merchandising juice machines, allocating prime store footage to display different brands. Without any new advertising effort, juice-making machine manufacturers now enjoy additional retail sales that were generated by The JuiceMan and The Juice Tiger infomercials.

This example proves that an infomercial may effectively sell directly to a specific TV audience while simultaneously producing retail sales. You can see how retail sales can be generated without any additional advertising expense - since the infomercial or DRTV spot which prompted the retail sales actually paid for itself through direct sales to TV viewers.

OUTPERFORMING RETAIL SALES

Moving consumers from conventional retail buying to direct response television buying is another triumph that demonstrates the power of infomercial marketer.

Until recently, women bought cosmetics from department stores or their Avon lady. Victoria Jackson began to sell complete systems exclusively through television infomercials. The only way customers could buy her products was by responding to her paid TV programming.

Prior to her infomercial, 3 out of every 4 Victoria Jackson customers bought cosmetics exclusively from department stores. In response to Jackson's success, Avon is designing an infomercial campaign of their own.

A NEW FORM OF TV ADVERTISING Today's infomercials are a far cry from the "long-form" televised sales pitches (5 and 10 minute commercials) of the early '60s. This was when half-hour shows sponsored by soap manufacturers gave birth to the term soap opera.

TV advertising three decades ago was largely confined to promotions which: (1) told viewers that a particular product with certain features existed, and (2) motivated viewers to go to the nearest retail outlet to buy the product. Television then, in the strict sense of the word, was nothing but an advertising medium.

Today television has evolved from a mere advertising medium into a dominant distribution vehicle. Today's infomercials and direct response TV commercials go beyond product promotion. They actually give the consumer a means to directly purchase the merchandise being advertised. Conventional TV advertising presents a product that is available through retail outlets or a distribution network.

Direct response TV ads actually sell products direct to the TV viewers. Direct response marketing remained the domain of mail order and other print forms of direct marketing until television matured, and advertisers began to recognize its direct marketing potential.

In fact, the terms infomercial and DRTV spots came into being because television gives the advertisers a platform conducive to direct marketing.

Coverage 98% of all U. S. households have at least one television set. In this Electronic Age, TV has surpassed all other media as our primary source of information and entertainment.

Cable TV 60% of all TV households in the U. S. have cable service, providing a wide variety of channel selections in comparison to an all broadcast environment.

Longer Hours Since we've evolved away from being a 9 to 5 society, television executives recognized the profitable viewership base found in late night hours. Remember when TV stations signed off at midnight?

Airtime Availability With thousands of national, regional and local TV stations, and with extended programming hours, airtime is readily available. The growth of Cable TV, satellites, and superstations has brought television a long way since the time when we only had CBS, NBC, and ABC.