

## 10 WAYS TO A BETTER DRTV SPOT

By Brad Thompson

With major corporations shutting down left and right and advertising budgets shrinking faster than the country's gross domestic product, it's very likely the ad world could begin to see a paradigm shift in the way clients spend their ad budgets.

I, along with many others in the community, believe that DRTV, perhaps once thought of as the Beast as opposed to the Beauty of glamorous brand TV, will soon find its way into the hearts – and wallets – of Americans.

This belief is based on the simple idea that in the years ahead, as budgets get tighter, clients will begin to gravitate more toward measurable, result-oriented advertising. Therefore, here are some simple, solid ways to get the most out of your next DRTV spot and keep your client spending what little remaining ad budget he has with your agency.

### 1. Skip the Spot, Remember the Product

TV viewing is incredibly different today than it was just five years ago. Thanks to the ubiquity of DVR technology, more and more people are altering the way they watch TV. No longer are viewers tied to the networks' arbitrary schedules. Instead, they can now watch anything at anytime. And, unfortunately for advertisers, nearly commercial-free.

So, how do we advertisers solve the problem of creating impressions while on 4x fast-forward? A little technique I like to call the DVR-buster. Simply create your DRTV spot with two or three static graphic elements, including the phone number and a Web site address and/or corporate name or logo. Have these remain on screen for the duration of the spot, even if you are eventually going to cut away to a full-screen art card.

The reason is simple. If the consumer fast-forwards through your entire spot, he will at least get a good, consistent look at the client's phone number, logo and Web address. All of which might be just enough to push him into re-sponse.

### 2. Know When To Bring Up Important Info

A lot of clients I've worked with want their logo, Web address, phone number and sometimes even the product name on the screen from the very first frame through the last. However, as the old saying goes, "There's a time and a place for everything," and DRTV is certainly no exception.

Think of your spot as a department store shoe salesman. Would you rather buy from a guy who starts screaming about a sale going on as you walk past the shoe department? Or from the guy who calmly approaches, introduces himself, asks you what you're looking for, and then informs you of the sale?

Therefore, let the consumer get interested by the opening seconds of the spot and allow him to make some kind of emotional investment. After you've hooked him – around 3-5 seconds into a 30-second spot and about 5-10 seconds into a 60-second spot – then you can introduce any corporate or product on-screen elements, such as logo, phone number, or Web address.

### **3. Keep The Message Simple**

One of the biggest problems I hear about and have experienced personally is clients wanting the spot to say 25 different things and say them all in the first 5 seconds of the spot. And, while I'm sure that Sony is currently developing a high-def video camera which can violate physics and bend space/time, the best we as advertisers can do today is try and convince clients to keep the sheer number of facts, benefits and advantages of the product as low as possible.

In order to convince clients of the futility of trying to put too many messages in a spot, I often use an example of a demonstration I witnessed while at an advertising seminar. The speaker was carrying some beanbags while talking about messaging. Suddenly, he yelled "Catch!" and threw five of the beanbags at an unsuspecting audience member. Needless to say, the guy didn't catch any of them while trying to catch all of them...you get the point. Sometimes this trick works, and sometimes it doesn't. But it's always worth the try.

### **4. Keep Everything Consistent**

As a copywriter, I was trained in consistency. Consistency of message. Consistency of look. Consistency of voice and tone. My mentors believed – as do the overwhelming majority of advertising professionals – that consistency is possibly the single most important element of any advertising endeavor. Those are the baby steps to building brand identity and making a lasting connection with your audience.

However, I have worked with more clients than I care to admit who have actually told me, "I don't care about campaigns. I don't care about a consistent look and feel. Just make the phone ring." At that point, after a deep sigh, slow shake of my head and a quick reevaluation of why I got into this business, I begin to figure out how I can either create a mini-campaign, or at least get by without completely reinventing the look and feel of any current messaging.

The bad news is that at some point in the presentation, you may wind up actually having to defend your position. The good news is that more often than not, your client will see the value of a consistent message and come around to your side of thinking.

### **5. Make It Entertaining – But Still Relevant**

I can't tell you how many DRTV spots I've seen that are so bland and unfulfilling that the golf channel is exciting by comparison...No offense to all the links-loving advertisers in the audience.

Therefore, if you want your audience to remember your spot, your message or at least the product name, make your commercial entertaining. And remember – entertaining doesn't always mean funny. Humor certainly has its place. As a writer, I tend to skew towards comedy and I always include at least one humorous spot in a pitch. If nothing else, it helps to warm up your crowd and lighten the mood.

However, entertaining can also mean cool effects, animation, a high-energy music track, a cool production technique or any combination. Just remember to always keep the spot relevant to the brand and never, ever, let effects or technique overshadow the message or the brand. At best, your audience will remember the company name and product of that cool or funny spot. At worst, they'll just remember some clever camera gimmick that will be cliché by next year.

## **6. End Strong or End Wrong**

The “art card” is the final graphic to appear on screen after all the live action of your spot is finished. It usually consists of the main call to action, including the phone number, Web address, product name, company logo and maybe some disclaimer.

It is customary for the art card to be on screen for 3-5 seconds, while your narrator announces the phone number and gives a final mention of the product. Remember to account for this time when concepting your spot and writing dialogue or announcer copy.

## **7. Create a Well-Rounded Spot**

One really effective way to create a memorable DRTV spot is what I call the Q&A method. In this, the talent speaks only to the benefits of the product and lets the announcer do all the “heavy lifting.” This entails speaking to the specific product features – usually by narrating over some on-screen text.

This method is particularly effective because it allows the audience to be psychologically fulfilled. The left – or logical – side of the brain feeds on the raw information provided by the announcer. The right – or emotional – side of the brain enjoys the narrative story that is being told by the talent. When combined into one spot, this Q&A method creates an extremely powerful form of advertising.

## **8. One Production, Two Definitions**

With the proliferation of high-def channels and TV's it's only natural that your client want create a spot in HD. However, what if your client wants to run the same spot in standard-def, as well?

During production, you'll actually shoot everything in a 16:9 format, regardless of whether you're using film or HD video. However – and this is the really important part – you'll frame all the action for a 4:3 aspect ratio. That way, when you're in post, and need to convert to standard def, the editor can simply perform what's called a “center cut extraction,” which simply means taking out the middle of the frame of the 16:9 footage and artificially enlarging it to fill a 4:3 screen.

Obviously it's important not to put any action or other information integral to the spot in the “wings” – the areas on either side of the 4:3 framing, as this will get chopped off when you convert the spot from 16:9 to 4:3. So what do you put there? Here's where you can get really creative. I've seen everything from simple colored vertical bars to animated logos to subtle, slowly moving backgrounds. Or, you can always just keep all the original footage – provided there's nothing important to the spot that will end up falling off the sides of the screen during conversion. It's really a matter of creative opinion.

## **9. Sound Off**

The audio track of your spot – including any sound effects and especially the music bed – can really help make the difference between your spot hitting that magic bullseye between the heart and mind of your consumer versus being so unimpressive that it simply ricochets straight off the cerebral cortex without ever having been processed.

However, because of the perceived less-than-glamorous nature of DRTV in general, some creatives may have the natural inclination to jazz things up with a rockin' sound track. Unfortunately, this can actually be detracting to your spot. Remember, DRTV is all about the offer. Everything else must act as support. So pick music that's light and not too overwhelming and be sure to keep levels well under the voice tracks.

## **10. A Time and Place**

Finally, after you have everything in place and the client is happy, you might be asked about placement. Most clients or agencies have media placement firms that handle this part of the process, but many smaller firms will not, and you may be put in the position of handling this area, as well.

Therefore, it is important to remember how the nature of your spot differs from that of retail or brand advertising and who your audience is. If you are doing a B2B spot, you probably won't want to run in the middle of the day, when most of your audience is at work, away from the TV. However, if you're selling floor cleaner, you should probably run heavy in the mid-morning when a good bulk of your audience is probably at home with kids, enjoying daytime talk shows. By taking a good look at what you're selling and who you're selling it to, you'll have an easier time creating a solid placement strategy, thus ensuring the highest level of success of your spot.

## **11. Awards Shows**

After the spot has aired and your client is happy, busily fulfilling orders as a direct result of your solid strategy, production and placement, it's time to show the rest of the ad world how great your spot is, via award shows. Here are a few of the most recognized award shows:

### **The DMA International ECHO Awards**

[www.dma-echo.org](http://www.dma-echo.org)

The Oscars of direct marketing, the ECHOs honor the very best direct marketing campaigns produced each year.

### **The John Caples International Awards**

<http://www.caples.org/>

Honoring the best in direct and interactive marketing around the world.

### **B2B Magazine Best**

[www.btobonline.com](http://www.btobonline.com)

The annual "Best Of" awards from the renowned business-to-business marketing magazine.

### **Telly Awards**

[www.tellyawards.com](http://www.tellyawards.com)

The Telly Awards honors outstanding local, regional, and cable TV commercials and programs, as well as the finest video and film productions.

### **Global Marketer Diamond Awards**

[www.thediamondawards.com](http://www.thediamondawards.com)

To identify, recognize and reward the kinds of breakthrough strategies, concepts and executions that add up to Best Practices.

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