

# **Beware Pitfalls of Direct Response Airings**

*by Robert Medved*

Some of the most important factors concerning a DRTV campaign are often overlooked. Even the biggest marketers and agencies look past details that can influence the bottom line of a campaign by a large percentage.

In today's climate of widespread bankruptcy, stations and networks would rather sell more fairly priced media to the people they like and trust than take a chance with a newcomer or a bad pay. Experienced agencies will also help you in areas other than just media - they will have long-standing relationships with many different vendors and be able to offer ideas on how to maximize your campaign.

Make sure your agency owns large packages of "incumbent" time on all the major networks and broadcast stations. This indicates that they have the respect of the cable and broadcast vendors, are financially stable, and will be able to provide you with all of the opportunities for a successful campaign.

Demand clear, precise data and reporting. You need tracking software that tells you orders as well as drag, to precisely analyze your airings. Drag describes the calls that come in to a toll-free number after the airing. Also, your reporting should show you what you have aired and are going to air by station. When reporting by station, you can view the history of a particular airing and whether you should air the same media again.

Oftentimes, a big schedule on a network can be doing well overall. However, specific airings may be bringing down the overall CPO or ratio without the marketer or agency taking notice. For example, you may run a Tuesday 10:30 p.m. that brings in 80 orders and pays out during the airing. If you have a Tuesday 2 a.m. airing that takes 20 orders and does not pay out, it may still show favorable results once the drag from a 10:30 p.m. airing also has been pooled into it.

## **Tracking Everything**

Make sure your agency software tracks orders and drag and allocates the orders correctly. The rule of thumb is that an airing usually receives 10 percent to 15 percent of its total calls as drag. If this software is implemented properly, you will be able to isolate airings that are actually hurting your campaign.

Your reporting should also track all up-sells and allow you to determine which ones perform best.

Your agency should send call volume reports to the inbound center prior to a national rollout so that the telemarketer can staff accordingly. Surprisingly, very few agencies forewarn a call center about the potential volume, as I learned recently in a conversation with a large inbound telemarketing firm.

If the telemarketer knows to expect 300 calls on a Wednesday afternoon at 3 p.m., it can staff accordingly and you will get more calls answered on the first try with little or no blockage. If the telemarketer is unaware of your airing on CNBC at 3 a.m. during a weekday, it may not be staffed properly and you will lose orders.

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Remember, the telemarketer does not always have 2,000 operators available. Weekends are especially challenging.

### **Testing a Call Center**

To test how well a call center is prepared to handle an airing, call during a larger weekend airing, such as on CNBC or Lifetime, and see how long it takes to get through.

A typical customer will hang up after getting a busy signal four times. If you are having trouble meeting call volume, consider using a split toll-free number, where two telemarketing firms take the calls for one airing. It's possible to split the calls with any dedicated toll-free number. It's also possible to split the percentage of calls between each inbound agency, for example, West Teleservices Corp. gets 40 percent, Convergys Inc. gets 40 percent and Telenational gets 20 percent. Splitting a dedicated toll-free number provides access to more operators and eases the blockage pressure.

Weekly test calls to a call center also can be very revealing. Besides checking your blockage, you can test to ensure your telemarketing script is being read correctly and thoroughly. Response to your last up-sell or buying club offer may decline 10 percent if the operators are not reading your long script.

Take notes on your test calls and be sure to note the time of the call, the toll-free number and the operator's identification number.

### **National Cable Concerns**

When buying national cable, be forewarned that national coverage is not always guaranteed. Some of the largest cable networks have contracts with local cable operators that allow the local operator to sell infomercial time regionally. Because of those agreements, you are not guaranteed full coverage when your infomercial airs.

Other companies can potentially buy up the local time, package it and resell it to other marketers. For example, CNBC viewers in Boston on a Saturday morning will not see the infomercial that airs in other markets at the same time. Instead, they see infomercials that someone bought from a company that repackages coverage time.

This practice is not illegal, nor is it necessarily bad for the marketer, as long as the time periods are priced accordingly.

It's important to be aware that coverage can be inconsistent. Make sure your agency is aware of which cable networks get covered and at what times.

### **Beware of Duplication**

Duplication occurs when an infomercial runs on different networks or broadcast stations at the same time. Running your own show up against itself can work, but why do it unless you have too? If you air a program simultaneously on BET and The Travel Channel, you are reaching millions of duplicate households.

At the beginning of a campaign rollout, you may not notice an affect on results because the pool of households that do not get both networks is big enough to sustain your response requirements. However, as that pool of potential direct response customers declines, you will notice the effects. BET and The Travel Channel do not exactly overlap households, but the households that aren't duplicated can be reached with another airing on another night. The duplication situation worsens with broadcast airings in a fewer number of households.

Our general rule of thumb is: Do not run any broadcast airings against each other in the same market, and don't run any late night cable airing against another for more than \$1,000 an airing.

Be careful with weekend dayparts, also. For example, we have enough data to know that a CNBC 3 p.m. running against a Good Life 3 p.m. and an Inspiration 3 p.m. does have a negative effect.

You and your agency also must know the current media clock and feed for each station. You may be running duplicate airings and not be aware of it. For example, a Learning Channel 3 a.m. on Oct. 5 airs against a TNN 3 a.m. on Oct. 4. The Learning Channel broadcast day begins at 3 a.m. and the TNN broadcast day begins at 6 a.m.

If your agency's software does not list media airings in real time, it is difficult to spot duplicate airings.

### **This Just In**

Be careful of what programming you run against. While you cannot prevent breaking news events, such as the Columbine shootings or JFK Jr.'s plane crash, it's surprising what agencies are willing to buy against.

I recently saw a fourth-quarter package in a major market that included a Sunday 3 p.m. airing. Normally, this would be a great airing at the right rate, but it runs directly against a home-team NFL game broadcast in the same market.

I called the station airing the game and asked what share they get when broadcasting the games and learned that it was 75 percent. This means that of all people watching

television during that time, 75 percent are watching the game, leaving 25 percent spread among all other broadcast and cable media. A great-looking buy suddenly becomes a Monday morning discussion of "I wonder what happened. Maybe it didn't run. We'll check into it."

Program lead-ins also matter. It helps to run a fishing infomercial in a fishing block or a kitchen item after a cooking show. Call the syndicator of major shows that you would like as a lead-in and they will provide you a list of the broadcast stations and times they are running.

Review the media on a constant basis with the agency and hold them accountable. Your media education as a marketer is the most important factor in running an infomercial campaign. What you don't know can mean the difference between making thousands and making millions.

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