

'DReality TV'

So what do primetime television's "Survivor" and Kevin Trudeau's "Natural Cures" have in common? Or how about "Dancing with the Stars" and ITV Direct's "Sea Vegg"? Here's a more subtle comparison — what about "Elimidate" and the "Magic Bullet" with Mick Hastie? It may not be obvious to you, *but* aside from the fact that these are all mega-hits in their respective spaces what else do they have in common?

The answer is in the headline. The primetime TV shows are all "reality" shows that have become wildly successful, while the "DReality TV" infomercials have become blockbusters for infomercial marketers and have allowed products that might not have made it to the airwaves to become instant hits. Both types of hit are great for the networks and the marketers because they cost a lot less money to produce and take much less pre-production planning to coordinate, yet they still get huge ratings and deliver huge responses.

DReality TV infomercials require virtually no scripting to make them successful. After all, according to the experts, if a commercial gets too scripted you might as well just go ahead and throw it away because it will more than likely bomb. The magic in the format for both reality TV and DReality TV is in the spontaneity.

Theoretically, the more you rehearse and the more takes you put in the can, the less likely you are to succeed. Pre-planned setups are appropriate, but re-dos after the natural response occurs are usually deadly. No matter what format you chose to use, the product is still king and the offer has to be extraordinary (i.e. you may get to be on the next show or you get to find out what they don't want you to know about and what is behind the censored CD).

So what are some of the downfalls to producing a DReality TV infomercial for the marketer who is looking for that next big hit, as opposed to committing to the six-month long mega-production that looks absolutely beautiful and might be nominated for an industry award while delivering very few sales? For one thing, it seems that DReality TV infomercials have a much shorter life span than does a highly produced show. When you add up the tape duplication costs along with the amortized production cost, it will be interesting to compare which format is more profitable.

The DReality TV infomercial format is a great way to test your product and offer before you invest in a mega-production because — again — product is king. If you can show that in a spontaneous way, you may just find



that it is worth investing in the major production. You've probably noticed that reality TV shows also seem to have a shorter lifespan at the top.

True, "Survivor" is still airing, but not with the same enthusiasm as it did with its first couple of seasons. Major hits like "Friends" and "Seinfeld" have topped the charts for years and have even bigger paydays in syndication. I doubt you will ever see "Survivor" in syndication.

Perhaps the correlation is in the branding and lifespan of the product. If you have retail and/or long-term continuity potential or are in it to brand your product, a more expensive production might be appropriate. But if you are in it for the short-term hit and don't think the product or the category is going to have sustained appeal, a DReality TV infomercial might be the best fit for you.

One final note: this observation may be overdue. There seem to be fewer and fewer reality TV shows being produced and more shows like "CSI," "Everwood" or "Lost" topping the charts. What's next? Still, if you haven't tried a DReality TV infomercial yet, you may want to give it shot. You just might have the next "Magic Bullet" show on your shelf and don't know it.



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