

Do You Skip the TV Commercials? You're Not Alone: Getting On the Show Is More Important Than Ever

Commercials used to be the time to get up and stretch the ol' legs, get a snack or let the dog out. Today, they are the signal to hit the fast forward button on the remote.

The advent of Digital Video Recorders (DVRs), often referred to by one of the leading brand names, TIVO, has finally given the viewer a break from the background noise of television advertising. Instead of being screamed at by local car dealers, pitched on the ShamWow or told repeatedly to not squeeze the Charmin, many consumers who subscribe to cable TV these days just zoom past the commercials without ever giving them a second look.

Jim Barton and Mike Ramsay, the creators of TIVO, don't even view their creation as a consumer product. They call it a "public service."

The consumer backlash against advertising has been building for years, and it is in all sectors. Even as advertisers shift their budgets from traditional to online media consumers are feeling empowered and fleeing advertising at every turn.

But don't take my word for it.

A study published late last year by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) makes it very clear that advertising industry insiders are running for the hills. The writing is on the wall when the ANA itself reveals that, "More than 80 percent of advertising executives believe that DVRs will have a serious negative impact on the effectiveness of TV advertising...changes in DVR penetration and DVR usage will result in changes in commercial viewership and changes in the cost of TV advertising. These changes, in turn, will affect the effectiveness of TV advertising, requiring a continuous revision of the tailored strategic response to maintain advertising spending efficiency."

With consumers finally in the driver's seat as regards their exposure to TV ads, savvy marketers are looking at the alternatives to expensive TV spots, especially when the penetration of paid TV advertising continues to be eroded by the growth of the DVR.

And that brings us to the point I really want to get across.

Today it is more important than ever to actually be IN the show, rather than have your message relegated to a few seconds in between the show's segments, lost in the fast-forward blur.

So what does "in the show" mean? It means you or your company's CEO or spokesperson booked as an expert guest on talk shows, or interviewed as an expert commentator on the news story du jour. It means you are part of the entertainment, not just another commercial spot-boring at best, most often annoying.

Being a part of the entertainment, instead of the interruption, delivers tremendous value in several other important ways. The most important of these is that people trust the news far more than paid ads. The tacit endorsement of a TV talk show host or news reporter carries much more weight with consumers—a favorable interview is seen as an implicit endorsement for your products, services or book.

A great example of this value is now known as "The Oprah Effect." Ten years ago, Oprah chose Spanx shapewear as one of her "Favorite Things," and sales boomed for the Atlanta-based clothing company that manufactures the line. Countless authors, companies, and even other television personalities (anyone heard of Dr. Phil?), owe their good fortune to Oprah's endorsement.

Now granted, there is really only one Oprah, but interviews on other television talk shows can have a similar effect on the market's perception of your products or book—even if it is not quite as drastic as an Oprah endorsement.

Is it time for you to look at how the increased media coverage of a good PR campaign could give your product or service a competitive edge? Next time you sit down to watch your favorite TV news or talk show, think about how the guests and expert commentators on the show appeared. If you watched the same "expert" pitching his product in a TV spot, would you have been as convinced of its value?

More to the point...would you actually have watched the TV commercial? I personally don't think I could actually sit through another 30 seconds of the brunette selling Progressive Insurance...hurry, where's the remote?

About the Author

For 20 years Marsha Friedman has been a leading authority on public relations as CEO of EMSI. Go to www.emsincorporated.com to sign up to receive her free PR Insider Newsletter today! Or call at 727-443-7115, ext. 202, or email at mfriedman@emsincorporated.com.

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