

Atomic's "Six Degrees" Approach to Building Brand with DRTV

By Doug Garnett, Atomic Direct

Having participated in the unprecedented growth of branded DRTV, I've seen the industry come a long way over the years. At the same time, DRTV is not yet delivering the brand impact – strategically as well as tactically – that our customers want, need, and of which the medium is capable.

Brand Clients Need to Set Their Sights Higher!

Rather than move brands forward, most of today's "brand DRTV" simply avoids doing damage. In part, this is because the expectations of many brand clients are too low. Fearing old-style "yell & sell" DRTV, brand clients often enter the business hoping only to find an agency whose work isn't going to embarrass them.

In their relief at finding the excellent production that is now the norm for DRTV, many clients go no further – unaware that *the bulk of this great-looking work is ineffective communication*. So they end up with work that, while it may do no harm, doesn't deliver the strategic power that great DRTV campaigns can deliver.

Most of today's branded DRTV is "A-Grade" production executing "C-Grade" communication, despite being produced by agencies with lists of excellent clients and cool production. Unfortunately, good production doesn't build brands – great communication builds brands.

Without "A Grade" communication, clients are getting only tactical benefits from a medium that is strategically capable of completely reshaping the future their business. Right now, the biggest players in our industry are simply not executing at that level.

To become a strategic driver in a company's brand-building mix, a DRTV campaign must fire on all cylinders. So what comprises "all cylinders"?

The Six Degrees of Brand DRTV

At Atomic, we've defined Six Degrees of Brand DRTV that have become a shorthand way to help us evaluate the effectiveness of our campaigns.

1. **Longer Time Formats.** DRTV is perhaps best known for offering longer increments of time in which to demonstrate to consumers the value that a

What is "Brand"?

"Brand" is one of the most abused words in advertising. So here is an operational description of the value of brands given by David Arnold in **The Handbook of Brand Management**:

[For a consumer] a brand is a form of mental shorthand. The main benefit is that it removes the need to shop around and devote effort to a [more] serious analysis of the choices in a product category.

Brands are made from 4 key elements.

- The *Promise* that the consumer relies on to make their choices.
- The *Product* (or service) that delivers the promise.
- *Creative* elements, which play a number of roles.
- Any and all consumer *Interaction* with the brand, the product, the ideas, and the promise.

product delivers. This ability to spend time talking about the ways that products affect consumer's lives offers a unique opportunity to communicate important strategic messages that communicate a brand's promise. Unfortunately, aesthetic judgments easily lead DRTV campaigns astray so they become simply longer (and dull) versions of traditional advertisements. So the first measure is how well a campaign makes use of the longer time formats.

2. **Communicating To Heart & Mind.** Having more time brings increased opportunity to build the brand's inherent value via emotional connections. This lengthier communication gives time to connect emotion, brand, *and* product to increase impact. Unlike traditional advertising which, given the time constraints, has to choose between emphasizing emotional connections or the product – DRTV allows time to do both well. When you connect product, brand, and emotion within the same advertising you create deeper messages that build a more mature brand relationship with the audience. So our second metric judges how effectively our advertising touches both the heart and the mind of the

consumer.

3. **Immediate Direct Response.** All brands "promise" things to consumers. But, promises only translate into solid brand value when they are fulfilled —when the consumer interacts with or purchases the product or service. The third opportunity DRTV offers brands is that it prompts consumers to take immediate action — calls come into the ubiquitous 800 number or, nowadays, web hits. *Tactically*, that immediate response generates direct sales that offset or subsidize the cost of the advertising (making DRTV one of the few forms of advertising that even an accountant can love). However, immediate response is even more important *strategically*, because consumers have bonded more strongly with a brand when they have moved beyond simply listening to messages to taking action. So our third metric measures the level of direct response we've generated.
4. **Measurable Response At Retail.** DRTV's prompting of the consumer to take immediate direct action via phone and/or web simultaneously creates strong and immediate impact through all sales channels, particularly retail. We measure the speed of this response across the channels (in-store, internet, catalog, etc.) with controlled testing, linear regression analysis, and consumer surveys. So, for example, we typically see between 5 and 20 units sold at retail for every unit sold directly by telephone. Once again, this tactic translates into strategic power, because one consumer taking positive action is more significant than hundreds or thousands of advertising "impressions".
5. **Inexpensive Media.** DRTV is purchased on a special rate card so it is the most cost-effective television advertising. We find that campaigns deliver results at ½ to ¼ the cost of other media. (A second reason DRTV helps you build good will with your finance department!) Even better, profit from direct sales can help offset media costs (or even pay for the entire campaign). Some brand DRTV campaigns deliver up to 10 or 20 times more impact, net, per media dollar. So, this tactical advantage of DRTV takes on strategic importance because it is worth millions of immediate dollars for additional media purchases.
6. **Brand Execution.** Our final metric evaluates whether a campaign has achieves great brand communication at two levels. The first level is brand basics. Will viewers recall the brand and connect it to the product? Are fundamental brand elements executed thoroughly (e.g. logos, colors, styles, etc.)? Does your consumer know the name of your brand?

The second level considers whether the campaign leverages the unique, and more sophisticated, brand communication that DRTV can deliver. Does it enhance the believability that this brand will deliver on its promise? Does it expand consumer understanding of the promise? Does it fit the product, and therefore brand, into the viewer's life in new ways? Does it make the promise more memorable? Does it connect the consumer more emotionally with the promise? Do people know exactly what they're going to get?

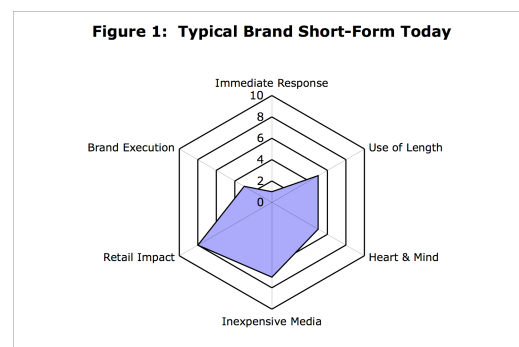
Many campaigns execute the first level well, but few execute the second level. Only when a campaign executes fully on both levels does it deserve a high rating in this category.

Fully executed, these Six Degrees create strong brand messages that move beyond merely changing consumer knowledge or attitude to something much more important: changing their behavior.

The State of Brand DRTV Today

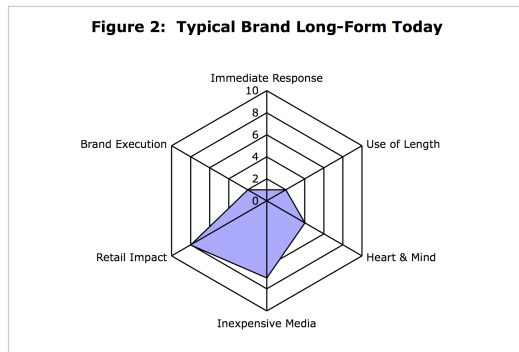
To evaluate today's DRTV, we've taken some typical campaigns and ranked their performance in each of the Six Degrees on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 means well-executed) then mapped the results onto charts. These charts make the challenge facing brand DRTV clients obvious.

Let's start with short form. Today, corporations are using short-form DRTV much more often than long-form DRTV. Figure 1 shows the weakness in recent short-form campaigns from companies like Proctor & Gamble, Home

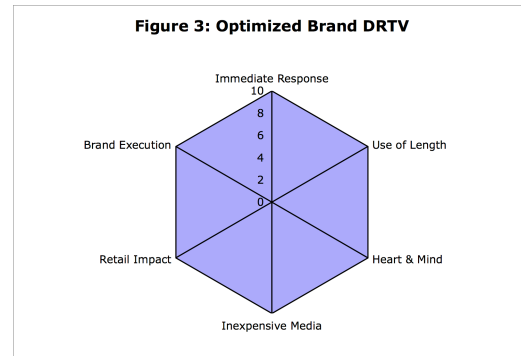


Depot, Hamilton-Beach, and Black & Decker. These companies use excellent production techniques and use DRTV effectively as inexpensive media that drives retail. But their fundamental communication has been poor and doesn't take full advantage of the medium. We give typical brand short-form campaigns today a B to C- in communication despite their A in production.

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Some brands have discovered the power of long-form DRTV. Unfortunately, the campaigns created for these clients again use strong production values but lack communication power. Examples of this weak communication can be found in recent work done for Bissell, Evinrude, Sunbeam, and, most sadly, the US Postal Service. The overall effectiveness of these Brand DRTV campaigns is shown in Figure 2. They are often little more than 30-second spots stretched for four or five minutes followed by more 30-second spots stretched for four or five minutes. I've reviewed this type of work for over 15 years with many test audiences. Consumers find it dull and uninformative. When consumers are asked to spend more than five minutes with a brand, they want meaningful messages. (Otherwise, reality show re-runs are much more interesting.) These campaigns generally warrant between a B- and a D in communication despite their A+ in production.



The Future of DRTV

The future of DRTV lies in its power to build brand. And DRTV can only move from protecting brands to building brands when we fully optimize campaigns in each of these six key areas (Figure 3). When a campaign reaches this level, the result is highly-leveraged brand development that makes bigger changes in consumer behavior more quickly than traditional advertising, especially when introducing new products, re-positioning brands, or expanding brands to new markets.

Today we have moved far beyond the old DRTV image of schlock and noise. In the process, though, the bulk of brand DRTV has become only "not bad". As a result, DRTV has not yet taken its place as an equal player among the options for building brands. But that, too, will come — when practitioners consistently create campaigns that move beyond the misleading idea that good production is enough, and communicate brand messages with the power that only DRTV can deliver.

About the author:

Doug Garnett is founder and president of Atomic Direct — a boutique DRTV agency with a unique vision of how brand-name products can be advanced through DRTV. Atomic's clients include DuPont, AAA, Rubbermaid, Alberto-Culver, the Drill Doctor and White's Electronics. He also teaches advertising in the School of Business Administration at Portland State University.

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