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Creative Television Promotion

Kristina Quinlavin

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Creative Television Promotion

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ABSTRACT

The advertising world is a place focused on research, brand identity, and creativity, all of which combine to achieve one seemingly simple goal: to convince the consumer to purchase a specific item. It is often a difficult enough challenge to persuade a buyer that a product is worth her money, but there is one product category that demands something much more valuable than any price tag cost. This category requires its advertising to create a personal bond with the consumer; to welcome it and want it in her life. What is this audacious sounding product that charges something greater than money? It is television programming and its price is time.

Selling television programs is an interesting and difficult task. It must successfully deliver the message that it is a product worth your time, which is a currency far less disposable than money. In order to explore and practice the challenge of creative television promotion, I have taken my experience from general creative advertising and specialized it to create a portfolio of five different multi-media campaigns, including network branding, specific program promotion, and special event advertising. This project is more than a portfolio of final advertisements, however. It has been a learning process of the television promotion industry and how general product advertising can be both applied to and differ from the development of this unique type of advertising.

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Behind every advertisement lies countless hours of research, strategy, and execution of which consumers only see a small percentage. Through my study of creative advertising, I have learned and applied these concepts mostly toward consumer goods. Syracuse University prepares students for the traditional creative advertising industry, however, after I was exposed to the entertainment promotion industry, I became hooked. Unfortunately, the advertising program does not cover this aspect of advertising industry, as it is a very specialized area.

When I decided to complete a thesis project I had nothing specific in mind, but as my interest for entertainment promotion grew stronger, this project became opportunistic. I had begun to experience the movie side of entertainment promotion and from it became curious about television. This ambition evolved into a topic for my thesis project, which thus evolved into an invaluable learning experience I could not have received anywhere else. My thesis project is a supplemental portfolio dealing exclusively with television promotion. In order to compile this portfolio, I spoke with promotional directors from the NBC and ABC broadcast networks, as well as the director from an external network branding agency.

Aside from learning about the television promotion industry as a whole throughout this process, I continuously discovered differences between this type of advertising and product advertising. Both of these aspects have different goals, different struggles and different methods to achieve success. It is interesting though, that advertising still has such a large effect on something

that one does not actually purchase. So often advertising is defined as persuading a consumer to buy something, yet television promotion's goal is to influence how people spend their time.

In addition to the obvious competition of programs on different channels, television must compete with other ways that consumers may spend their time. A single program must directly compete with its competition on-air from other networks, however, it must also compete with activities such as video games, out-of-home activities, and its most direct threat, the Internet. According to a study on how the Internet is changing daily life conducted by the Stanford Institute for Quantitative Study of Society, people who use the Internet watch television for an average of eighteen minutes less per day than the national average of two hours. Norman H. Nie, the director of the Institute in 2004, referred to time as "Hydraulic," meaning that time spent doing one thing takes away from another (Markoff). Television promotion must keep this concept in mind when determining what exactly it is competing against, it must convince the viewer that watching a specific program/network is the best possible thing she can be doing with her time at that precise moment.

In order to achieve this complex task, it is a smart strategy not to directly compete with what the consumer's day is already made up of, such as family and personal time, but to instead create an emotional bond between the viewer and the program. According to Douglas A. Ferguson, "Effective television promotion seems to work on an emotional level through the devices of humor, warmth, or drama" (Eastman, Ferguson and Klein, 85). The viewer

should regard watching television as an actual component of her family time and other activities they enjoy doing, not as another independent activity that requires additional time commitment. In order to achieve this feeling, promoters aim to develop the program into appointment television. This type of television is programming which people make a point to watch: they know what day and time it is on rather than simply watching general television and stumbling upon a program. With each new project, television promotion must overcome the great challenge of persuading the viewer that a program or network should become a part of her life.

Another challenge unique to television promotion is the fact that the product is constantly changing. Promotion should depict the current tone of the series, which depending on the program, can change with each episode. This makes this type of advertising faster-paced, shorter-lived, and more directly interactive with the actual product (Miller). In other words, the job of television promotion is never done. Although the demographic remains constant for the most part, promotion must alter itself to adapt to changes in the script, its time slot, and the outside environment in order to maintain its appropriate presence in the viewer's life.

In order for any type of advertising to be successful, whether it is for paper towels or a network event, there is a similar structure that is followed. Preliminary research must be conducted to obtain a firm understanding of where the product presently is and where it would like to be in the mind of the consumer. Once this is determined and analyzed, a strategy must be formed as

to how this goal is going to be reached. All of the work completed through the development of a strategy is then summarized in a creative brief, which is then given to the team who will execute the project (Miller; Avery, 36).

Although both types of advertising follow this process, one main difference between the two results in many alterations along the way. This main difference is the availability of time. Product advertising can take months to complete a single campaign, and devotes substantial time to further segments within each stage of the advertising structure. It has the opportunity to conduct a lot of primary research, that is, research conducted specifically for a project, and analyze it in regards to budget, media placement and marketing strategy. Television promotion often works with a much smaller time span and as a result does not formally go into such depth of the advertising structure as product advertising can (Miller). It relies greatly on secondary research, which has been previously conducted. A commonly used example of this type of research for television promoters is Nielsen Media Research, which publishes regular ratings of programs.

After research is gathered and analyzed, the account management or planning team in product advertising constructs a creative brief. This brief includes information such as: a description of the product, the objective of advertising, what is the competition, who is the target, what do they currently think, what do we want them to think, why should they believe it, and what is the most persuasive idea to communicate. This brief is presented to the creative team, which use it to execute an appropriate campaign.

As a result of its fast-paced work environment, television networks “make heavy use of prerecorded promotional spots on their own air, usually producing them in their own studios” (Eastman, 7). The majority of television promotion projects are developed and produced without a formal creative brief. Instead the promotion team discusses the program’s position in ratings, its upcoming events, and how they feel it should be promoted.

This atmosphere is not always the case for television promotion. With respect to a branding approach, Ferguson states “the most effective use of promos take place when the network can organize a campaign around a theme.” He references the Must-See-TV ads on NBC as a “powerful branding tool that has enhanced all the programs of the network” (84). Networks like NBC and ABC consider branding to be just as crucial as Ford and Budweiser. With this goal in mind, networks work to promote special projects in a manner that will compete effectively with its advertiser’s commercials and breakthrough the clutter (Eastman, 85).

Special network projects may include a network event, program branding, program premiere, etc., and is where television promotion can greatly resemble traditional creative advertising. When presented with a project like this, network and program promoters use the longer and more comprehensive process that is found in product advertising. These projects are when creative briefs are utilized as well, although they are much simpler than those used in advertising agencies. Television briefs include a description of the project, for example, the 20th anniversary of the VH1 network, the primary and secondary

(if applicable) target audience, a description of the network/program being promoted, and lastly the promotional strategy (Miller).

Chuck Blore, a producer of television and radio promotion explained that, “Promos that simply provide program information become part of the wallpaper of television messages. There needs to be an element of memorability built into the spots or ads to make them stand out” (Eastman, 83). This genre of television promotion is what I decided to gain experience in through completing a thesis project. I took the knowledge and practice I acquired through my classes and applied it to the promotion of several different television projects. With each campaign, I kept in mind the issue that the viewer must accept this program/network as a part of her day, but also executed in the conceptual manner of product advertising. I developed strategies for each project based on research, which included information about each program/network and its target. I also researched the television promotion industry as a whole by interviewing John Miller, president of The NBC Agency, and who is responsible for NBC Universal’s promotion. From this research, I constructed a multi-media campaign for each project, achieving the goals and standards of its brief. Throughout this project I utilized print executions, which are placed in magazines; on-air promotion, which is aired on television; and promotional items, which are promotional giveaways.

VH1 20th Anniversary: *Here's to another great twenty years.*

The VH1 cable network celebrated its 20th Anniversary in 2005. The task of this project was to create a campaign for the entire VH1 network based on this anniversary. The Viacom website describes VH1 as a brand that likes to have a strong connection with its audience. This target audience is adults ages 18-49, married with a dual-income, who watch television after work to relax, and although they keep up with pop culture and have a general idea of new artists, they feel more comfortable discussing artists from when they were younger.

This event became an opportunity for VH1 to renew and even strengthen its connection with its audience. By taking a nostalgic look at the past twenty years, viewers will fondly recall how specific artists, pop culture as a whole, and they themselves have changed. This campaign should spark memories of the concert they lied to their parents to get to, or the album they waited in line for hours to get autographed. It is also important to keep in mind that although MTV is often considered a threat to VH1, they are both owned by Viacom and the different networks target two different audiences, therefore, this campaign should focus on VH1's own audience and not on converting MTV viewers.

The final campaign includes executions for print, on-air, and promotional items. The tag for this campaign, which is carried over all media is *Here's to another great twenty years.* The entire campaign displays how artists who have been continually successful over the past twenty years have

changed with time. The produced executions include Bruce Springsteen, Madonna and Janet Jackson.

Print executions take the form of a personalized scrapbook for each featured artist. These scrapbooks include photos, ticket stubs and handwritten comments, which would be written by each of the artists themselves. As readers flip through each scrapbook, feelings of sentiment and nostalgia will be experienced of themselves, the artist, and the VH1 network. These executions have the ability to appear in many different genres of magazines. Some examples include, *Rolling Stone*, *Time* and *Oprah*.

On-air commercials consist of the present-day artist performing a modern hit and will transition into an earlier song from the 1990's. During this transition, video editing will add the artist from the 1990's to join the present-day artist. This transition will happen again, ending with three versions of the featured artist; one from the 1980's, 1990's and today all performing together.

Lastly, the promotional item, which can be mass-produced and distributed, is a flipbook of each artist transforming from 1985 to today.

Shrek 2 Television Network Premiere: *Shrek invades TV*

This project involves the network premiere of Shrek 2 on ABC. Shrek 2 is the second of the very successful Shrek movies and appeals to a very large range in audience age. The primary target of this premiere is mothers with children ages 8-12. These women still have control over what their children watch on television, hence, why they are the primary target and not the

children themselves. If her children saw Shrek 2 in the movies, she was most likely the one who took them. The secondary target audience for this event is kids and teens ages 8-18 (Movietome). Due to its great success in the theater, those who have not seen it already will be inclined to watch, and those who have already seen it will want to watch again.

In accordance with the characters and tone of the Shrek movies, along with the age diversity in its audience, a campaign was produced that is fitting for the movie and has the ability to appeal to different age groups. The concept behind this campaign is that Shrek is invading television. This campaign has been executed through print, on-air, and promotional items.

The print executions place Shrek and other characters from the movie in obvious advertisements for the ABC programs, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Desperate Housewives* and *Dancing with the Stars*, indicating that Shrek is invading ABC. These print advertisements can appear in magazines that will reach mothers including *Real Simple* and *People*.

The on-air executions are similar to print, where Shrek appears suddenly in a scene of several ABC programs. Shrek will converse with the characters for just a few seconds, with the dialogue always ending with the program's character telling Shrek that he isn't on T.V. until March 19th. These programs are *According to Jim*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Desperate Housewives*. The diversity of programs used in both print and on-air allows the campaign to reach all age ranges of the target audience.

Additionally, there is one more print ad that includes a promotional item. This execution will appear in magazines that will be read by both mothers and children. With the idea that Shrek is invading television and bringing the movie to your home, an advertisement was developed that contains an easy-to-construct movie popcorn tub that can be used for watching the premiere. The popcorn tub will be constructed and set out in either the kitchen or television room, serving as a constant reminder as to when Shrek 2 is on television.

**March Madness: *Some things may last for only four years,
but PRIDE lasts a lifetime***

March Madness is an annual college basketball tournament for the top 65 teams in the country. It is what basketball fans refer to as the best time of the year, and it is when students, alumni and fans from all over the country watch and cheer. The target audience for promotion of the tournament coverage is men ages 18-49. He either goes/went to college or has a team he roots for, and will watch a game if he notices it's on, but does not make a very large effort to watch during the regular season. He watches games at home either after work or on the weekend, and seldom goes to watch with friends at a bar (Miller).

Since the targeted fan is somewhere between being in the dark about his team and painting his stomach in school colors, the concept is to excite him about the upcoming tournament and to reawaken his school spirit.

The tag line for this campaign is *Some things may last for only four years, but PRIDE lasts a lifetime*. It is executed through both print and on-air media. The print advertisements feature different ways people express their pride, including a mascot tattoo, waving a college flag outside of a house, and dressing kids in apparel from their parent's school. The on-air executions are very similar to the print and feature montages of different people exhibiting these three different acts of school pride. These print executions will appear in magazines like *ESPN Magazine* and *Men's Health*.

An extension of this campaign offers tournament sponsors the opportunity to place their name on banners and car decals of different colleges for distribution to alumni and game ticket holders. This distribution will promote both the sponsors and coverage of the tournament itself to alumni and fans across the country.

Breakfast with the Arts: *Transform your morning*

Breakfast with the Arts is a two-hour show every Sunday morning at 8A.M. on cable's A&E. The show serves as a weekly crash course in what is going on in the art world and is hosted by Karina Huber, who interviews different performers, writers and artists each week. The primary target for this program is women ages 30-55. She may have young children and is employed full or part-time. She views Sundays as a day to spend with her family and to catch up on things around the house (A&E).

In order to appeal to busy Mom, the strategy behind this campaign is to position this program as a great escape for the woman who no longer has time to visit museums, go to concerts, and read much for pleasure. Working with this strategy, the concept behind the promotional campaign for this program is *Transform your morning*. This campaign tells the target that by setting aside some time and making this program a part of her week, she will be able to visit a different museum, listen to a different poem, and learn about a different artist every week without leaving her living room.

This campaign has been executed through print, on-air and promotional items. Both the print and on-air campaigns use the concept and tag line of *Transform your morning* and show kitchens transforming into different art and cultural environments, such as a museum, poetry reading and concert. These print advertisements will be placed in magazines like *Real Simple* and *Oprah*.

The promotional item for this program features both the art and breakfast aspects of the show by creating breakfast recipe cards with a painting, poem, or performer displayed on the other side. These cards, along with bookmarks for featured authors, can be distributed through day-cares, where busy mothers often are stressed and receptive to the idea of a break, grocery stores, libraries, and other locations busy mothers can be reached.

Scrubs Syndication: *Make Scrubs part of your day*

This project involves the NBC program Scrubs entering syndication on cable's TBS. This means that previously aired episodes of Scrubs will air

Monday through Friday nights on TBS. *Scrubs* is one of NBC's most successful comedies and employs a dry and sarcastic sense of humor. It follows the teaching of four medical students and, despite being set in a hospital, remains light-hearted and funny. The target audience for this project is young adults ages 16-25. They enjoy sarcastic humor and may have sparingly watched the show on NBC, but never got hooked (Miller).

The promotional strategy for this project must achieve two things: to educate viewers that *Scrubs* is now on every weeknight, and to make clear that it is a comedy, not another hospital drama. The chosen tagline for this campaign is *Make Scrubs part of your day*, and it uses the playful humor of the show to communicate its syndication.

This concept was executed through print, on-air, and promotional items. The print advertisements show a simple everyday scene where an ordinary object is replaced with something from a hospital. The presence of a scalpel instead of a knife, an IV instead of a milk or juice container, and a white coat and scrubs hanging with an apron, all illustrate the idea of making *Scrubs* part of your day. These executions will appear in magazines like *ESPN Magazine*, *Jane*, and *Entertainment Weekly*.

The on-air promotion interacts more with the program itself, and features the very cynical Dr. Cox, who teaches and loathes the students. He finally gets away from the students, but then sees them everywhere he goes as a result of the show's syndication. These executions include Dr. Cox walking into his living room and seeing them on his T.V., shopping in an electronics

store where they are on all of the display televisions, and entering a bar where Scrubs is on the overhead television.

Lastly, the promotional item for this project is a weekly pillbox with a different Scrubs character inside each day's compartment so that viewers can literally make Scrubs part of their day. The pillbox is a fun way to make a strong connection between the plot of the show and its presence on television every night.

Television promotion is a unique aspect of advertising. It can take its own form as a fast-paced process or can resemble that of long-term conceptual product advertising. Regardless of the process it undergoes, however, its goal remains constant. In order for a television program to be successful, it must form a bond with the viewer and earn a steady place in the viewer's schedule and life.

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