

The DRTV Times

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PRODUCTION DELAYS THAT COST MONEY AND TIME—STREAMLINE YOUR PROJECT TO AVOID THEM! TIPS FROM AN EXPERT!

By Edward Easton

Ron Perlstein, executive producer at Concept-Media will soon embark on a series of seminars and panel discussions sponsored by the Electronic Retailing Association (ERA)

Perlstein, part of a team of creative professionals, will be offering a smorgasbord of helpful hints to the DRTV conscious entrepreneurs attending these seminars across the country.

Perlstein says, "Most client companies see the DRTV producer as a magician who is single-handedly going to boost the company's bottom line. Very often this happens, to such spectacular effect that the process does indeed seem magical. In reality it is anything but. The success comes through careful planning and zealous adherence to a production schedule."

Perlstein's lament is the same that plagues all DRTV Production companies. Often the client company, once having settled on a strategy and budget for the project, decides to expand or "improve" the whole idea in the middle of the game. This leads to unnecessary expense and risks an otherwise successful outcome.

"For example," Perlstein adds, "A small dot com company whose product was e-commerce solutions came to us not long ago. The CEO outlined a modest infomercial plan with a budget not to exceed \$50,000 and be completed within nine weeks. He asked us to come up with a package that met this original vision and we did. At that price, we were forced to make do without a celebrity

and use non-union talent. There is no dearth of that in Florida and a lot of it is excellent. We came up with an excellent concept, script, locations and production package to fulfill his original vision. With a third or more of the budget committed, the CEO brought in his own creative director who decided mid stream that the project should be much more ambitious. This modest little infomercial, which was designed to meet his immediate needs wound up costing more than twice as much as the original and stretched the CEO's capital needs almost to bankruptcy. Tip number one: Put your creative team in place and then give them their head—be careful in your selection of a creative director, or point person to coordinate with the producer. Make sure his or her vision matches yours from the beginning."

Perlstein's tip number two is to "Set a budget and *stick* to it. Have the courage of your well thought out original convictions. Be aware that video or motion picture production of any kind is expensive, especially when the cameras are in place and rolling. Time is then the most valuable thing you have to economize on. Anything, or any process that wastes it is terribly destructive."

Tip number three: "Once decisions are made, don't second-guess them. Iron out any script difficulties or celebrity selections early on and allow no deviations from the schedule. A lot of advance planning can go up in smoke by not following this rule. If your budget is \$25,000 for the celebrity talent, don't expect to hire from Hollywood's A-list. And if you plan to desert Tinsel town altogether for the sports world—don't expect Tiger Woods or Michael Jordan

to front your product either. Celebrity acquisition is an art form, facilitated by brokers and agents, all of whom must take a cut from the budget. So that original 25 grand is going to take some slicing and dicing before the celebrity will see his money. On a percentage guarantee deal, the celebrity will often take a chance with you, but the budget must be thought out for both the front and back ends. In short—hire somebody who's an *expert* in this process.

Tip number four: "Every project starts with a concept and a script. The script must fit the celebrity as the celebrity fits the product. If you acquire Charleton Heston to sell bibles or guns—both of which, incidentally, he has done, don't give him a script written with "Puff Daddy" Combs in mind.

Tip number five: "This is perhaps the most important one," Perlstein concludes, "Give the project the priority it deserves. Most client companies, especially successful ones, are already aware of this. It is inevitable that a situation will arise that calls for a fast executive decision. Make sure someone is on the set during production that has full authority to make it.

What happens, for instance, if your star is injured in a fender bender on the way to the shoot? Production insurance against this is a given, but that just protects against immediate financial loss. What happens next? The producer may suggest a fix, a delay or a rescheduling of the shoot, but whatever is decided will need a client company authorized rep around to pass on whatever decision or action is taken. Following these simple rules will help ensure a successful outcome of the project for everyone involved."

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