

At a time when the direct marketing industry is in a period of overall growth, increasing by 10 per cent last year to reach an expenditure of £11.14bn, you'd be forgiven for thinking it was good news all round. But according to the latest DMA Census (*Marketing Direct* July/August 2002), one quarter not doing so well is DRTV.

The Census shows that while other DM mediums have been enjoying a steady increase in spend, DRTV expenditure has plummeted 26 per cent in just one year. It fell from representing 16 per cent of all DM expenditure in 2000, to representing 10.8 per cent.

"It's been a bad couple of years and it is a symptom of the malaise in TV advertising in general. The budget's not what it used to be," says Roland Mizon, marketing manager at DRTV production house Space City.

But is the death knell sounding for DRTV? Pippa Easton, client services director at DM agency Clark McKay & Walpole, says she struggles to relate to the Census findings. "A lot of our clients are going back into DRTV. There's a huge number of competing channels, so costs are low," she explains. "Secondly, people are producing ads overseas where they can get high production values for low cost."

This may explain why expenditure is down. Admittedly, Easton says, this mainly applies to the charity and financial services sectors but she refutes any claims that DRTV is on its last legs.

Returning to DRTV

Supporting this, CMW client the RSPB is actually returning to DRTV after a five-year break. It tested it in the late 90s but stopped because it could not set up direct debits over the phone. "Now many charities can fulfil paperless direct debits, which has enabled them to go back into TV," says Easton.

This is all well and good, but the perception of many consumers and marketers alike is that DRTV is characterised by similar looking charity and financial services ads.

Dan Douglas, MD of DM agency DP&A, thinks that dumbing down is a big problem. "Too many DRTV ads are formulaic," he says. "There's an amorphous template, particularly in financial services and charities, born of lack of ambition and a risk averse culture."

Even the National Canine Defense League's marketing director, Adrian Burder, who spends £1 million on the medium and is a firm believer in the power of DRTV, is realistic about this



Although figures on DRTV spend are down from last year, there is optimism that the medium has a bright future if the technology improves and new sectors explore its potential *By Melanie May*

DRTV'S new direction

Case study: Army

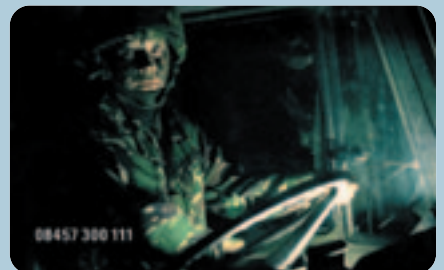
In what was designed as a break from the usual DRTV formula, the latest ads that broke for the Army just a few weeks ago focus specifically on individual soldier's lives.

Four 30-second ads have been created by DM agency Publicis, with an ad spend of £2.8m. To achieve the right balance of interest and personality, more than 200 real soldiers were interviewed for the ads – each one representing four of the Army's career groups: combat, engineering, logistics and IT/comms. On the shoot, the soldiers were also asked to improvise lines so that the end result was as natural and authentic as possible. Scripts were then written based on these.

The ads are initially showing over an eight-week period on Channel Four, Five, and on satellite channels. "The creative helps manage the fears the target audience have about

joining the Army," explains Mark Bainbridge, Army head of recruitment marketing. "It succeeds in communicating the skills and training the Army offers, in a language the audience understands and responds to."

The ads support the Army's new marketing strategy that it understands its careers are demanding, but they also have a human face.



view. "In 1997 we had outrageous results," he says. "We still make money now, but there has been a fall. On satellite TV, there is one depressing charity after another. A certain amount of audience de-sensitisation is inevitable."

"This is certainly one of the reasons why spend is down," says Vincent Matthews, studio manager at DRTV production company Endorfin. "People believe DRTV is only for charities, and if you're a marketing director, would you want to use a mechanism that people are tiring of?"

But is DRTV really restricted to charity and financial sectors? The answer is a resounding no. More companies are taking to DRTV, producing innovative and appealing ads.

Tango led the way in the FMCG sector, getting into DRTV as early as 1994, working with agency HHCL. The two worked on a number of Tango's early DRTV projects still remembered today, including the Go Tan voodoo doll ads and more recently the megaphone ads showing a man being humiliated by orange-haired golfers. Viewers were asked to ring for their own voodoo dolls and megaphone.

"The voodoo ad ran for a couple of months and the phone line was open for a year," says Richard Huntingdon, head of planning at HHCL. "In that



DRTV: although finance and charity still dominate, other sectors are coming on board

Case study: Rimmel

Last November saw cosmetics giant Rimmel try its first iTV ad across Sky 1, Sky Movies, Living and Trouble. Aimed at 16-34 year-old women the ads featured the launch of its Exaggerate Hydra Colour Lipstick. The ad gave a free lipstick sample to viewers when they registered by pressing the red button on their remote control. Rimmel was helped by fulfilment firm Diss Promotional Marketing Solutions, who liaised with Sky to collect the order data on a daily basis. In the 27 days the ad ran, 52,000 names and addresses were collected – a response rate of 3.2 per cent – and 64 per cent of respondents opted in to

further marketing from Rimmel. According to Rimmel the ads had branding and response "to recruit new members in an engaging way".



time we received around 400,000 calls and sent out 250,000 dolls." In a departure from DRTV norm, it also made money and increased brand awareness.

This year has seen more FMCG brands take to DRTV, particularly cosmetics and toiletries. Pantene ran a sampling campaign between January and March this year. Aimed at driving the trial and brand awareness of Pantene Pro-V shampoo, it was a mystery unbranded campaign inviting women to ring a number and get a free sample. L'Oreal and Rimmel (see box below) have also gone down similar routes.

Going interactive

Interactive ads are also beginning to come to the fore. Mizon calls it "a natural progression". There are signs advertisers are starting to look at interactivity to garner instant responses to ads. Douglas doesn't think the technology is there yet but agrees it has real potential. "It's the place for DRTV to go at a meaningful level. Being able to click a button and make a purchase or donation has great value," he says.

The recent Depaul Trust ad using Publicis's VODKA technology took this a step further, allowing viewers to decide the narrative route of the ad themselves using iTV. However, only one platform provider, Kingston Communications, can provide this functionality so far.

Matthews certainly has hope for the medium because of this potential, but also because of the players determined to take DRTV to new levels. Endorfin has recently done a DRTV ad for a watch brand, and is currently filming another ad on high-definition cameras of the type *Star Wars* was filmed with. "We're trying to be more innovative," he finishes. "There is a lot of hope for DRTV, you just have to keep pushing at the boundaries." n