TV offers valuable marketing lessons

Turn to the small screen for some guidance when it comes to internet marketing

– By Dianne Volek

TV clearly dominates as our media of choice. We would rather watch the news on CNN than read the newspaper, watch cricket rather than listen on the radio, and Alias outrates a novel for the average South African. So, what can you learn about internet marketing from the mass media?

KEEP IT LIVELY
Most people turn on the TV for relaxation and entertainment. Ensure your website goes beyond a dry list of facts and statistics about your product or service. Internet users tend to be well educated and highly paid, so keep your content intriguing for the intelligent and well-read consumer.

LOOKS COUNT
Television appeals to the eye – billions are spent on the latest graphics, camera work and special effects. If you expect people to spend time on your website, you can’t assault them visually. Make your website great to look at. Keep your prospective reader’s age, tastes, culture and computer literacy in mind when you design.

MANAGE YOUR PEAK VIEWING PERIODS
M-Net puts the best movies on during peak times when people are most likely to be watching. If you have a new product launch, a year end or a peak time for sales, your site will be visited more often. Plan your powerful effort into descriptive, emotive copywriting.

GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT
Strict TV ratings ensure that the TV networks continually provide viewers with more of what they like, and less of what they don’t. (Even if what they like is not good for them!)

Many companies get web statistics – all to few do anything with them. There is no benefit gained from publishing perfectly designed and written pages on your company history or CEO’s personal philosophy … that no-one reads.

PROMOTE YOUR STARS
The entertainment industry knows the value of stars. People like to get information from those they respect, admire and relate to. If your organisation has genuine experts, promote their names, faces and insights on the web to enhance your credibility. Unlike a magazine or TV commercial, your website has unlimited space.

LEARNING FROM TELEVISION’S MISTAKES
DON’T BE PREDICTABLE
After two sessions of Big Brother, the new one is such a yawn – and it’s showing in the ratings. TV scriptwriters generally stick to safe, familiar concepts. Don’t give your website’s readers a terminal case of déjà vu.

DON’T GET DATED
If you’ve ever watched one of the early Star Trek episodes, you’ll know how outdated clothes, attitudes and hairstyles can impact on credibility. You’re so busy laughing at the silver miniskirts that you miss the plot!

ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE
The top TV series have lead actors and storylines that engage viewer on a personal level. Don’t be afraid of drawing on readers’ emotions and empathy. Products can’t be touched on a website so you will need to put extra effort into descriptive, emotive copywriting.

Keep your content fresh and your design up-to-date. Don’t forget that search engines often find pages that are old (even if they are no longer linked to the main page). If you want to keep archive materials, give a date at the top of the page.

THE WEB ISN’T A 30 SECOND COMMERCIAL
The internet trounced TV news coverage during the Iraq War because it was the only place you could find non-war news! Content is not limited on the internet – you have space for all niche interest groups. Use your website to give more in-depth coverage of your products.

MAKE IT REAL
One of the first things one notices about a cheap TV soap is the quality of the dialogue. We all know how real people look, speak and behave. Avoid trite statements and anything that sounds like it was written by an accountant or MBA graduate.

DON’T FOLLOW THE LEADER BLINDLY
The success of ER was followed by a whole set of hospital dramas … that failed. Be careful of trying to follow your competitors too closely, even if they win awards. Firstly, they might not have the same product and marketing strategy as you. Secondly, you will be seen as an also-ran, on a communication medium where innovation wins respect.

Dianne Volek owns InterComm, a company specialising in digital marketing strategy and communication. For further articles on internet and intranet strategy and technology, go to www.intercomm.co.za.