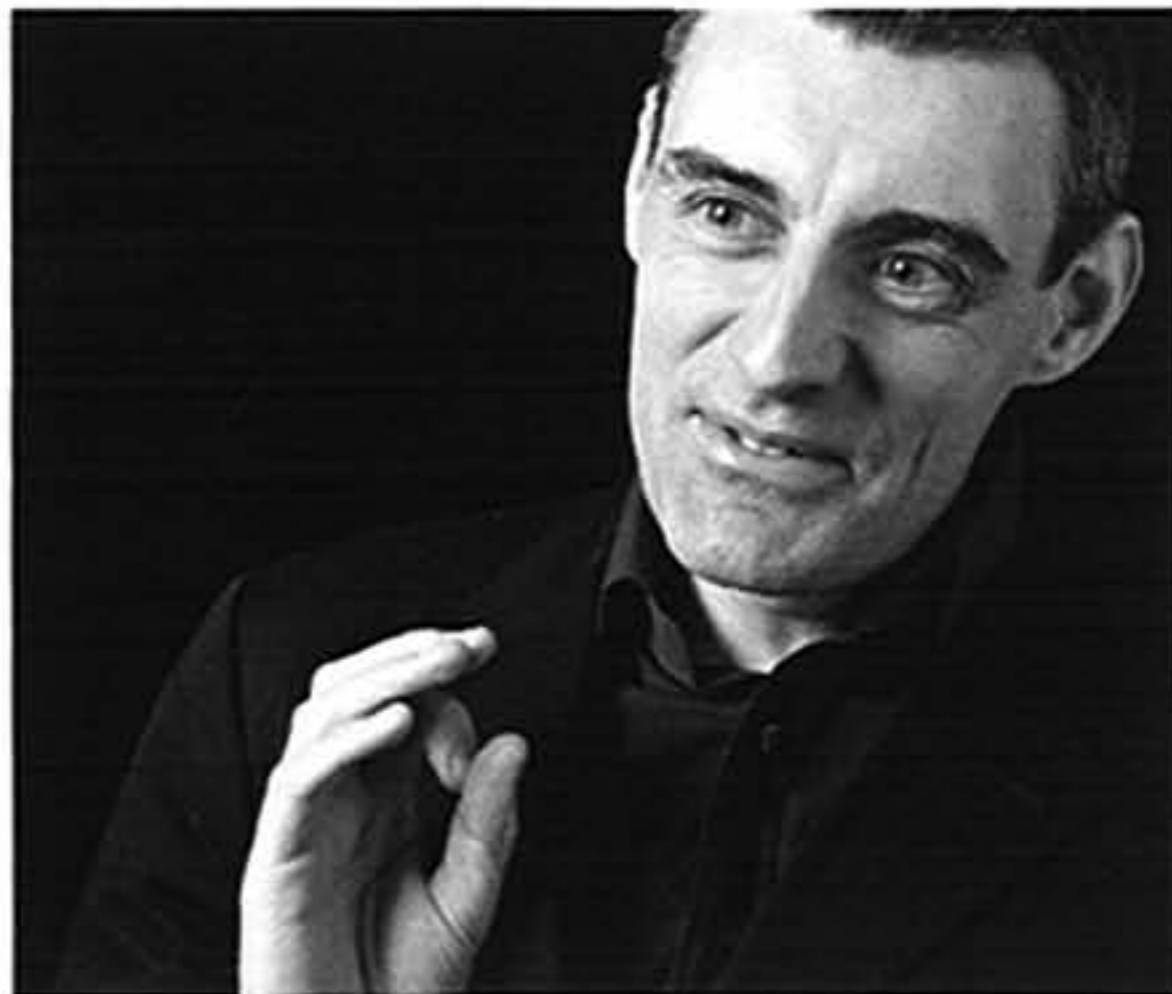


Can B2B star on TV?

It's not often B2B ad campaigns grace our TV screens, but Direct Line and Heathrow Express are both currently advocating the medium. The question is, can, and should, other business brands follow suit?



Richard Exon, CEO, RKCR/Y&R



Jim Prior, managing partner, The Partners

Richard Exon: YES

It's dangerous to assume that marketing to business people about business products is only relevant and likely to succeed when carried out in a business context. It's true that not all B2B brands will benefit from the small screen, but some will. Think Gordon Ramsay in the BT Business ads or Direct Line's latest offering. Two brands with plenty of marketing know-how, ploughing megabucks into TV advertising.

People don't inhabit one mindset when they are at work and another when relaxing at home in front of the TV. Make no mistake, my little grey cells are still on the job long after the PC has shut down – and if you're in charge of a business, the work-life divide becomes even murkier. Anything that can benefit your company or save money is worth watching.

The devil is in the detail and brands need to understand the medium of television and how to make it work to their advantage. The golden rule is to understand the audience and do your utmost to engage with them, especially as they may be surprised to find a B2B ad slotted in between toothpaste and cornflakes. Don't be shy about showing off your brand's creative streak – B2B ads should be just as innovative as their consumer counterparts.

Be smart with media planning and construct messages that resonate. Always be sympathetic to the fact that you're talking to people in their 'time off' – there's nothing more irritating than being bombarded by clunky business messages. It's like your boss wandering into your living room, curling up next to you on the sofa and showing you a Powerpoint demonstration.

So yes, B2B can star on TV. And when it's integrated with other media – e.g. digital, print advertising, experiential media and direct marketing – TV can form the backbone of a successful campaign.

Jim Prior: NO

B2B brands that choose to advertise on TV are wasting time and money. In truth, they probably know that – it's just that their egos have got the better of their intellect.

TV advertising works when the size of a target audience matches that of the TV audience. It's a cost per head equation. If your audience is ten million people then spending £10 million on a campaign – a cost of £1 per head – is a reasonable investment. It makes sense for mass-market consumer brands, but not for B2B for whom the real decision-makers numbers a few hundred people at most.

There is also fundamental disconnect between how B2B decision-making works and what TV advertising is capable of achieving. B2B decision-makers aren't influenced by 'pester-power' and 'feel-good factor'; they don't make decisions spontaneously at the point-of-sale based on subconscious memories formed during the commercial break in Coronation Street. They make informed, considered decisions as a result of intelligent dialogue with a number of prospective suppliers. It's not that there isn't some room for emotional influence, just that it's never going to be possible to put a robust case together in 30 seconds of film.

So, why do some B2B brands do it? It could be the ego of the CEO or the marketing director – plagued by the question they always get asked at dinner parties, "What is it you do?" – they are trying to make themselves famous.

The message to B2B brands considering TV advertising is this: spend your money more wisely. If you want to make your brand – and yourself – famous, invest in making your products, services and customer experiences unique. Ten million pounds spent there could go a long way towards creating a famous B2B brand. Ten million pounds spent on TV however, is an inefficient road to nowhere.