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Spotlight

DRMA Spotlight: Extending a Long Winning Streak

1 Sep, 2012

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"We're really picky with the items that we choose," says Steve Heroux, founder and CEO of Williston, Vt.-based Hampton Direct, a marketer of successful As Seen On TV and retail products. "We do a lot of research to make sure that we have good items to begin with. You can't build a good campaign without an item that consumers need."



The company's history of choosing the right products — especially in recent years — is almost unmatched. A list of the Direct Response Marketing Alliance (DRMA) member's hits is not difficult to remember. How about PajamaJeans®? Remember Total Pillow®? Who marketed Twin Draft Guard®, Wonder Hanger®, InstaHang™ and Furniture Fix™? Those legendary DRTV hits are all Hampton Direct products — and all of them have hit in the past six years.

However, the company's history with consumer products and direct marketing goes way back. "Mail order has a big history in our family, and I've been in consumer products since graduating from college," Heroux says. "I'm also an inventor myself, so the DR business is a perfect fit for me."

Heroux and his father started Hampton Direct in 1995, selling products to catalog companies. "In the late 90s, I brought one of our products to a major catalog customer of ours, and she thought it would be a great fit for QVC or HSN," Heroux recalls. "We took Meatball Magic — a product that allowed you to make a bunch of meatballs instantly — to QVC. They loved the item. It did really well, and from there we started building our home shopping business."

That home shopping business is still going strong, but in 2006, the Hampton Direct team decided to take the plunge into the short-form DRTV space, with Twin Draft Guard, a double-sided draft blocker for windows and doors.

"It ended up being a huge success for Hampton Direct, both in direct response and at retail," Heroux says. "Five years later, it's still sold in all major retailers around the country."

And Hampton's string of hits hasn't stopped since. In 2008, the company introduced the Wonder Hanger — another great DR-to-retail success — before bowing its most surprising success, PajamaJeans, in 2010.

"Social media was huge for PajamaJeans," Heroux says of the product, which received incredible mainstream media exposure that began with a comedy bit on "The Tonight

As Seen On Response TV



Show with Jay Leno" in fall 2010. "From that opportunity, the product just took off. Celebrities started talking about we: and

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Stretch Genie and instahang, both of which hit the market earlier this year, and Furniture Fix, which has been selling since late 2011, build on Hampton's core goal. "The common denominator with those three is they are great, inexpensive solutions to common problems," he contends. "For \$9.99 to \$14.99, people can pick these up and solve a real problem."

This track record of success has a commitment to research and perfectionism, according to Heroux. "We probably take a lot more time than most folks to make sure we do everything we can to get a good response on a campaign," he says. "Once we do have a campaign working, we'll launch at retail. Our marketing will hit it from all directions, including social media, PR and traditional advertising. That's probably why our batting average is over 50 percent of all products that we shoot end up at retail, as opposed to maybe one out of 10 or one out of 20 — the industry standard."

And now, Hampton Direct is looking to try its success rate in long-form direct response for the very first time, as they were on set in August shooting a show for PajamaJeans. "It's totally new for us, but we're launching a long-form show this month with a celebrity host," Heroux says. "We think it's going to bring even more awareness to it. We're also getting ready to shoot two or three more long-form products."

He says Sonia Makurdsik, the company's executive vice president of marketing, has a history of long-form success, and that Hampton Direct believes that will continue. "It will give us access to products we didn't have before," Heroux adds. "There was a price point we couldn't get to with short-form products, and you can expand on that with long-form."

While long-form and continued retail success both play a major role in Heroux's plans for Hampton Direct during the next five years, he's also bullish on expanding relationships with the inventor community. "Innovation is what drives this industry," he says. "Any new items that are unique, have a need and are priced right will sell. We're working really hard to get as many inventors as possible to work with us."

It's clear that Heroux believes focusing on long-form success, inventor relationships and retail expansion will help Hampton Direct navigate through what he expects to be challenges during that time.

"Margin erosion is an issue," Heroux contends. "Media's getting more expensive, the cost of goods is getting more expensive — everything else is getting more expensive. And the margin is just shrinking. It's about marketers getting smarter, creating awareness at a more affordable price so that we can make the matrix work."

Heroux also mentions the challenge of understanding social media within a campaign. He asks, "How do we convert all that traffic into sales? How do we reach out and make sure the awareness is where it needs to be for the product to be successful?"

Still, retail remains the overall focus of each Hampton Direct campaign — today and looking ahead. Heroux says, "It's about creating the campaigns to create the awareness of the products, so when the consumer sees it walking through an aisle — whether it's Bed Bath & Beyond, Walgreens or Wal-Mart, they've seen the commercial a couple of times and they're really interested in the product."

Building Retail Partnerships

A main factor in Hampton Direct's success has been the relationships it's built with key retailers.

Ask Steve Heroux, founder and CEO of Hampton Direct, about the key to his company's retail success and he's clear: it's about those relationships with retailers.

"Retailers know our campaigns' track record and that we're really good at creating awareness," he says. "When the product is in their stores, the sell-through will be there for them."

Here is a partial list (from Hampton Direct's website) of the company's retail partners:

- Ace Hardware
- Walgreens
- Bed Bath & Beyond
- Wal-Mart
- CVS
- Kmart
- Kohl's
- Lowe's
- Rite Aid
- Sears
- Staples
- Target

