

TV Ads

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No matter who you're trying to reach, you'll find plenty of opportunities on network television.

Appropriate For: Any business

Typical Cost: \$90 to \$2,500 per commercial; \$2 million to \$3 million if you advertise during the Super Bowl! Rates vary greatly, so before setting a budget, contact your local rep for rates in your area.

How It Works: Almost everyone would like to advertise on television. And really, it's not so hard to buy TV schedules. Why? Because no matter what demographic your audience falls into, you can find appropriate programming on any one of the networks. Every station reaches every audience daily, with schedules that include cartoons, celebrity, talk, sports, soaps, news, movies, reality and prime time programs. Just take your pick!

Like all forms of advertising, there are different price ranges within the TV medium. Locally, you can pick up a 30-second commercial slot in a show like *Oprah* for an average of \$90 to \$300 (but check your local affiliate because prices fluctuate), or get into a noon to 4 p.m. soaps rotation with the same commercial for \$150 to \$300, again depending on your location and also the time of the year. You'll pay anywhere from \$200 to \$1,500 per 30-second commercial for local news at noon, 5 to 6 p.m., 6 to 7 p.m., sometimes 10 p.m., and 11 p.m.; the most expensive time is usually 6 to 7 p.m. The best thing to do is check with your sales reps for a list of programs that fit your needs at the time you want to advertise. Nationally, you can expect to pay double the local rate. If you're in a situation to be able to buy nationally, find a media buying service or an ad agency that will do your buying for you on a commission basis.

Prime-time commercials are going to be pricey even locally, but audiences can be huge for popular shows. And here's an insider's tip: When rerun time rolls around, refuse to pay the full price for your commercials in any time slot. Many reps won't volunteer the lower rate--you have to let them know you won't pay the same amount for reruns and then stick to your guns. Programming like *Good Morning America*, *Today Show*, local and national news, and soaps never have reruns and are always a good bet because the audience stays true all year long.

This is the one form of advertising that can include actual bidding when push comes to shove. When someone wants the time slot you've already purchased, they'll offer more--and bump you out. You always have the opportunity to up the price you're willing to pay, of course, but many businesses can't afford to get into that kind of bidding war. When is that most likely to happen? The fourth quarter of the year is when lots of inventory is snatched up by holiday ads. And anytime a hot political race--either local or national--is going on, you can be sure the competition for time slots will increase. Unfortunately, these are also the times when small and midsized businesses really need coverage but get shut out.

While some large businesses are starting to use more 60-second commercials to try and cut through the clutter, the length of choice for most commercials is still 30 seconds. In most markets, you have the ability to run a combination of ads--that is, you can mix 10-second or 15-second ads in with your 30-second

spots, which allows you to increase the number of times your ad is seen without the higher cost of paying for all 30-second ads. The reason it's important to increase your frequency this way is because the number of times your current and potential customers see your ad is directly related to whether they react to it. But don't think you can *really* increase your frequency if you run *all* your commercials in the shorter lengths, because they're only meant to be reminders—they're not long enough to provide the critical information a 30-second ad can hold. Their best use is to bolster your regular commercials and increase retention of your longer message.

One good way to capture a lot of people watching at a particular time is to run an ad during the 6 to 7 p.m. or 11 p.m. news on all your local news stations on the same day. That delivers your message to just about everyone watching the news at that time.

What's the best time to buy TV time? The first and second quarters of the year, with the first quarter being the best for negotiating discounts. Sales reps are scrambling to make their budgets when advertisers are trying to recover from their holiday expenditures. Deals will be made! Don't hesitate to compare prices from station to station or among comparable programs. As long as you're choosing programming that suits your audience, it doesn't matter if your commercials are scattered over different networks. Negotiate your little heart out, and if you know you have the budget, go ahead and settle into an annual contract. This can mean running a certain amount of commercials every week or just agreeing to run a certain number of commercials during a 12-month period without having to know exactly when you'll run them at the time you sign the contract.

Under normal circumstances, you'll receive a 5 percent discount for signing a 6-month contract and a 10 percent discount for signing an annual contract, so don't accept these as "big deals" when negotiating during the first quarter. You'll get that consideration anytime.

Kathy Kobliski is the founder of [Silent Partner Advertising](#) in Syracuse, New York. She is also the author of [Advertising Without an Agency Made Easy](#).