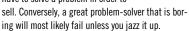## By Jordan Pine

The more time I spend evaluating products for DRTV, the more I refine and perfect my pass/fail checklist. In the past, I have put this evolving checklist down on paper and given it clever names (*e.g.*, the "Divine Seven"). Recently, I looked at the challenge a different way: What if I had to give someone new to the industry a list of screening criteria for products? What would that list look like? The answer features five such criteria (the "Fabulous Five"?) and some recent examples to illustrate each point.

1. PROBLEM

Imagine a 10-point scale for problems. A "1" on that scale is an itch. A "10" is a heart attack. A "5" is one of those everyday annoyances people hate, but not enough to actually do anything about it. The problem your product solves should be about a "7" or higher. If the problem is below that level, only one thing can save it: being really cool. A product that is exciting to watch in action doesn't always have to solve a problem in order to sell. Conversely, a great problem-solver that is boring will most likely fail unless you jazz it up.

Positive Example: Phil Swift's **Flex Seal**, No. 1 on my True Top 50 hits for 2011 (at *scimark.blogspot.com*). If your roof is leaking, that's a problem you need to solve *now*.

Negative Example: Phil Swift's **Blast Off**, a de-icing spray. At a particular moment in time, ice could possibly spike above a "7" on the problem scale — and possibilities like that fool a lot of people. But how often is ice really a problem? Here in the northeast, in the dead of winter, it wasn't even an annoyance this year.

2. AVAILABILITY

If the product is already widely available at retail, it won't find success on DRTV. The fastest way to check top retailers such as Wal-Mart, Walgreens, CVS, Target and Bed Bath & Beyond is online using a tool such as Google Shopping, but walking actual brick-and-mortar stores is also an excellent idea.

Positive Example: IdeaVillage Product Corp.'s **Finishing Touch** and **Micro Touch** hair removers, now in their 10th year of success — an unprecedented run in our business. **MicroTouch Max** even came in at No. 21 on my True Top 50 for 2011. Why? There are no other hair removers like them at retail.

Negative Example: IdeaVillage's **Finishing Touch Smile**, a tooth-whitening pen. It would be hard to pick a more available solution than a tooth whitener.

3. TARGET

Describe your target in media terms; that is, by gender and age. For example: "adults 50+," "girls in their teens" or "men of all ages." Recognize that DRTV buyers tend to be Baby Boomers or older. It's possible to have success targeting younger demographics, but the odds go way down. Next, determine the size of your market. The goal is to have a product with a market size of "every household in America." Anything smaller is a segment or a niche, and it better be a large one. Have a strong rationale for niche items and, more important, a valid statistic proving the niche is as large as you think it is (*e.g.*, Census Bureau data.)

Positive Example: TELEBrands' **Aluma Wallet** (No. 10 on my True Top 50 for 2011). Forget every household in America; almost every person in America can use this product.

Negative Example: TELEBrands' **Nail Doodle**, a nail-decorating kit. Wrong age demographic for DRTV — if you want to have a better than 1 in 50 chance, that is.

4. PRICE

There's a good reason everyone thinks a DRTV product must sell for $20 or less with a cost of goods one-fifth its price: almost every product that hasn't met those parameters has failed. The "below $20" price is required to get consumers to buy on impulse, and the "5X" margin is required to make money from the sale. If you don't have a good eye for what things cost, look at the current selling price and screen out products above $30.

Positive Example: Allstar's **Eggies**. A dozen Eggies for $10 *and* two egg slicers? What a deal!

Negative Example: Allstar's **Infinity Filter**. Another pitfall in DRTV is the "comparative value trap." Compared with similar products, this water filtration system was a great value at $29.95. But it was still $10 too high to be an impulse buy, no doubt because of its cost of goods. Also, I'd argue anything that requires installation automatically loses 'impulse purchase' status, regardless of price.

5. CATEGORY

Finally, it is important to recognize that there are certain product categories that have excellent odds of success based on DRTV history, and others that have terrible odds. At the extremes are categories that deliver hits every year or two (*e.g.*, slicer/dicers, hair removers) and categories that have never been successful on DRTV (*e.g.*, clothing, jewelry). Do not waste time chasing items in categories with bad histories.

Positive Example: Media Enterprises' reintroduction of the **Sobakawa Pillow**. Not only was it hot in the past, but the pillow category has been consistently hot almost since the dawn of DR. These days, if you include long-form, there are at least four successful pillows on TV.

Negative Example: Media Enterprises' **Bra Tree**. Not the worst example I could find (by far), but I had to keep the symmetry! Joking aside, my problem with this product is that: a) closet organization has a poor category track record if you exclude products that save space, and b) bra-saving products specifically have a limited, negative history on DRTV. The single attempt before this one — **Bra Baby** — flopped. Still, there's nothing wrong with pitching an idea to consumers twice (as opposed to thrice, which runs afoul of my "third time is never the charm" rule). ■