

## Are You Ready for QVC?

Get an inside look at the TV-shopping giant and how you can get your product in front of millions.  
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Over the past 15 years, TV shopping networks have exploded onto the retail scene, offering viewers an interactive shopping experience without ever having to leave their living rooms. It's proven to be an extremely successful formula, creating loyal, consistent customers (who are primarily female) who relish the products and the experience. In fact, QVC is considered by some measures to be the second-largest TV network in the country, with millions of daily viewers tuning in and making purchases. QVC has also been a great boon to entrepreneurs, who can achieve extremely high exposure in a short period of time--even for new products.

So how do you get your product onto the promised land of QVC? And what are the pros and cons? I recently entered the QVC world with one of our Mom Invented products--Good Bites Crustless Sandwich Cutters--and I'd like to share my experience to help entrepreneurs who might be interested in pursuing a similar path.

QVC is always on the lookout for new, innovative products. And the company is supportive of entrepreneurs--especially female ones. In fact, right now, QVC is offering a program tailored specifically to women entrepreneurs. Sponsored in conjunction with OPEN from American Express and Count Me In, the Make Mine a \$Million Business program is designed to help women grow their sales by offering a combination of money, marketing and mentoring opportunities. It consists of three separate product searches and educational seminars, all whose goal is to help women surpass the \$1 million sales mark in their businesses.

Of course, not every product suits the network's format or marketplace, so here are some questions to ask yourself to help determine if your product is the right fit:

- Does it demonstrate well?
- Does it solve a problem or make life easier?
- Does it have unique features and benefits?
- Does it appeal to a mass audience (as opposed to a niche)?
- Is it topical or timely?

If you think you've got a fit, there are a few ways to approach QVC. Each of them is relatively simple, so it's definitely worth a try--especially because QVC's base target sales rate is in the range of \$6,000 per minute, well worth the effort if your product is chosen.

The first way to approach QVC involves [visiting the website](#) . There you'll find information on making an appointment with a QVC buyer to present your product. In addition to hosting appointments at their headquarters in West Chester, Pennsylvania, QVC also hosts regional appointments in various cities around the country for which you can apply (see site for details). If it's not convenient to attend one of these regional meetings, you can start the process by simply applying online--you'll be surprised how quick and straightforward the application process is.

My experience with QVC began when I submitted my first product, the TP Saver, for their review a few years back. When they e-mailed me that they were interested and invited me to present my product, I was elated! Due to my naiveté as a new inventor, I arrived feeling quite special, only to find 2,800 other "special" inventors also waiting in line to present their products!

Fortunately, QVC is a well-oiled machine, and while I thought the cattle call experience would be frustrating, but the staff members treated each of us as if we were the only one in the room. I presented the TP Saver to a buyer and she liked the product, but it didn't meet their criteria for price (the preferred minimum unit price for QVC is in the \$15 range and the retail price for the TP Saver is just \$5.99). Although I wasn't chosen this first time out, I persisted and have since had multiple appearances on QVC with products that *did* meet their specific criteria.

Another inroad to getting on QVC is to approach the category buyer for your product directly. To do this, it'll help to become familiar with their programming. One thing QVC does is create special program themes like "beauty" or "kitchen essentials." Watch for special programming in which your product might fit, and use it as leverage when presenting your product.

#### Seller Beware

Of course, with anything that promises great rewards, there's usually some risk. QVC is no exception. While the network offers an incredible opportunity to new entrepreneurs, potential participants should also understand that they'll assume some risk should their product be chosen.

Because QVC is so customer-oriented, the company must have enough inventory in stock to satisfy a very large number of potential buyers. That means you must manufacture and ship enough inventory to QVC to meet a very substantial market demand--prior to your appearance on the show. You're then paid only if or when QVC sells your product. So if you present your product on the show and consumers aren't interested, you'll end up sitting on a mountain of inventory. This is important to understand going in, because it can take a large investment to prepare and deliver enough inventory to meet QVC's potential distribution needs.

#### The Chosen

If your product gets chosen, you'll face the ultimate challenge--being prepared and ready to convince millions of people across the country to purchase your product on the air. (And you thought convincing the QVC buyer was nerve wracking!) The following are some tips to help you make the most of your QVC experience:

- **Remember that the host is on your side.** The night before my first appearance on QVC, I was jittery in anticipation. It helped to remember that the host would be there to help me and I wouldn't be put on the spot as I had sometimes experienced during news interviews. In this situation, we were all invested in the same outcome because my success would reflect well on the host. That said, it's critically important to allow the host to do his or her job. Think of it as a dance--the host is leading and you are following.
- **Learn to manage your airtime.** A QVC guest is given approximately six to seven minutes of airtime. That means you need to be able to describe your product in short, succinct points. It's absolutely essential to practice beforehand--out loud--so your answers become automatic. You may think you know your product inside and out, but when the camera lights are on and millions of people are watching, your body often doesn't cooperate with your brain, and a physiological reaction sets in, causing your body to sweat and your mind to go blank. I cannot overemphasize the need to practice, practice, practice. When you get nervous, you ramble; when you ramble, you waste time--and on QVC, time is money.
- **Don't forget to have fun, be passionate and enjoy the experience.** Those feelings will come across to the consumers watching you. If you look like a deer in the headlights, you won't convey a positive, successful impression. Remember, the consumers are buying into you *and* your product. Presenting yourself well is part of the sell.

QVC and other shopping networks offer a truly awesome way to promote and distribute your product. And even if your product doesn't sell at quite the level you hoped, you've promoted your product to millions of people--advertising you couldn't afford any other way--who may just buy it next time they come across your product.