

## **Selling on QVC: nice work if you can get it**

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So you think you have a pretty hot product. What if you could show it directly to people via a television channel that reaches 166 million homes worldwide, as well as the 6 million monthly visitors to the channel's Web site? What if most of those shoppers were loyal repeat customers, credit cards at the ready? And wouldn't it be fun to hear them boost your sales while you're on the air as they call in to say how much they love your stuff?

It's not too good to be true; it's QVC. Launched in 1986, the West Chester, Pa.-based channel broadcasts live 24 hours a day, every day except Christmas, offering about 60,000 products annually. Viewers call in an average of 15,000 orders per hour. Since its inception, \$7.5 billion-a-year QVC (the letters stand for quality, value and convenience) has shipped more than 1 billion packages in the U.S. alone.

QVC is even more tight-lipped than most private companies. No one there will say how much of a cut QVC gets on sales of each product, for instance, and vendors are prohibited from revealing any numbers if they want to stay on the air. But it's fairly clear that a hit product on QVC is akin to a license to print money.

There's just one catch: Getting on is tough. Very tough.

First, QVC's 170 buyers look for a unique product (ideally, a patented one) that isn't widely available elsewhere. It has to be made of top-quality materials. If you're trying to get your foot in the door on QVC, don't be surprised if an inspector drops by to examine your manufacturing process. Next, whether the product is a piece of jewelry, a small appliance or an item that falls into one of the other dozens of categories of goods that QVC sells, it can't just sit there looking ordinary. It needs what Teddy Marcus calls "a 'wow' factor."

Mr. Marcus started a company called Arcs & Angles that has been selling shower curtains on QVC for 12 years. The patented curtains have holes that enable them to slip directly onto curtain rods, so they can be hung without hooks. When he unfurls them on the air, QVC's phones start ringing.

"It's been great for business, but [this route] isn't for everyone," he says. "You have to be a talented salesperson, first to sell to QVC and then to impress its viewers."

You also have to be willing to submit to exhaustive vetting. Dr. Irwin Smigel, whose dental practice on Madison Avenue at East 59th Street maintains the pearly whites of George Clooney, Johnny Depp, Jennifer Lopez and many other celebs, invented and patented a line of products—toothpaste, floss, rinse—called Supersmile. Six years ago, QVC approached Dr. Smigel and his wife and business partner, Lucia, about putting the brand on the air. They agreed. QVC then spent a year and a half poring over independent scientific analyses to make sure that Supersmile really whitens teeth.

“It’s been fantastic for us,” says Dr. Smigel. “There’s no other way we could compete with companies like Procter & Gamble that can spend \$90 million to market a single brand of toothpaste.

“But the scrutiny they put us through was extraordinary,” he continues. “If you have a product that is mostly hype, it just won’t fly.”

Want to give QVC a whirl? Go to [www.qvc.com](http://www.qvc.com) and click on “Vendor Relations” to get started. Good luck.