



**Golf products  
are climbing  
aboard the  
infomercial  
bandwagon**

On the Air	
Here are some of the golf infomercials that aired in 1997:	
COMPANY	PRODUCT(S)
Adams Golf	Tight Lies wood
Alien Sport	Kian Ultimate wedge
Black Ice Golf	Black Ice driver
Black Rock Golf	Killer Bee Driven Mile High Deadline putter
Combs Golf	Gyroseven Wood/Viper Big wedges
DualPro	DualPro Snake driver
Fishman Golf	Scholar Titanium driver
Golf One	Gary Player Grand Prix iron
Golf Solutions	John Daly's Power Groove swing trainer
Greg Norman's Secret	Greg Norman's Secret
Guthy Renker	King Kong driver
IMM Manufacturing	RainZett Double Up putter
IronDrop	TeuDrop putter
W-Tet Direct	Green Golf's putter
Lavel Best Golf	Angeleno/Scratch Score Golf
Love It Golf Co.	Love It
Protek Golf	Golden Bear putter
Seashore	SeaMine putter
Sidario Enterprises	Putboard
Top-Flite	Intimidator 460 woods
Taylor Made	Burner Bubble Irons and woods

Source: ResponseTV magazine

## Made for Television

**O**DDS ARE, sometime during the wee hours of the night or on a lazy Sunday afternoon you've watched an infomercial. You can't escape them: More than 500 infomercials plugged the air waves in 1997. Part of a broader category of advertising known as "direct response television" (any commercial with a phone number or address to let viewers order a product directly), infomercials are distinctive because of their length—from 30 minutes to an hour. You can thank (or I blame) the Federal Communications Commission, which lifted a 16-minutes-per-hour restriction on commercials in 1984. Low production costs and the proliferation of cable channels also account for the explosion in infomercials. According to 1, NIMA (National Infomercial Marketing Association) International, infomercials pulled in revenues of \$1.4 billion in 1997.

So it's not surprising that golf companies are entering the infomercial arena—at least 24 golf infomercials hit television screens last year (see "On the Air"). Manufacturers used them to describe products in technical detail or cover company history, stories that can't be told in a 30-second commercial. Infomercials also have provided avenues for small companies to break out of obscurity. For example, Alien Sport, which ran one of the first golf infomercials, in 1994, has sold more than \$31 million worth of Alien Ultimate Wedges. Adams Golf's "Tight Lies" infomercial, which cost little more than a half-million dollars to produce in 1996, boosted sales of the fairway/utility wood company from \$3 million to \$30 million in one year.

Besides featuring quirky product names like "Killer Bee" and "Gyroseven," golf info-mercials are a little different from those pushing exercise equipment or psychic advice. Golfers don't usually sit around talking indoors in front of an audience (they're on the course),

and the only "celebrities" are golf personalities such as Greg Norman, Gary McCord, or Roger Maltbie. According to Tony Kerry of Script to Screen, which created infomercials for Adams, Alien Sport, and Taylor Made, "the principle key is to use people our viewers are used to seeing in golf."

Many producers also stress "visible technology," citing the success of a club such as Adams Tight Lies, with its inverted head shape. "Because Adams shows graphics and 'morphing' from a traditional head to the Tight Lies head, people can say, 'Oh, that's the difference,'" says Jim Harrison, a co-founder and former executive of Alien Golf who had advised Adams on its infomercial.

And you'll probably see only one club per infomercial. "It's pure logistics," says Barney Adams, CEO of Adams Golf. "It's too complex to try to offer different lofts and flexes. The consumer gets confused."

Knowing what works on screen means these companies have to do their homework. "I researched for seven months before I ever did anything," Adams says. That's because production costs have skyrocketed in recent years, ranging from \$200,000 and up, according to Dave Nagel, editor-in-chief of *Response TV* magazine. That doesn't include the cost of telemarketing services, packaging and design, video or audio tapes, and market research. (A one- or two-minute commercial spot typically costs less than \$100,000, not including talent.)

Another expense is air time, which can range from as little as \$25 for a small UHF station to \$50,000 or more for a major net work. Mike Kelly of Taylor Made says budgets for each of its two "Monster Hole Challenge" infomercials were in excess of \$2 million, with about the same projected for a third being produced this year. Eytas Urbas of

Guthy-Renker, a direct response producer that recently opened a golf division, predicts his company bought nearly \$100 million of television advertising time for golf and other product categories in 1997.

It's these high costs, and increased competition from other infomercials, that have turned off some golf companies. Look at the numbers: Only 1 in 10 infomercials financially succeed, and 7 out of 10 viewers never buy a televised product of any kind. Even then, sales of the most successful golf products pale in comparison to such products as the Sobakawa buckwheat pillow, which pulled in \$70 million last year. So although you'll see newcomers like Ray Cook (for the M1-Xi putter), industry giants Callaway Golf and Titleist are sticking to traditional advertising. "We're backordered as it is," says Jerry Woodward of Callaway, "so we really don't need to use that type of media."

Infomercials also have a limited life. "They are good for a couple of years," says Harrison. "But even if a product has true long-time value, [sales] are going to fall off rapidly. So you either have to come up with another product, get out of the business, or turn to some other marketing. There are a lot of decisions to be made."

According to Nagel, "The business keeps getting harder and harder. Across the board, people are responding less and less to infomercials." He says the trend now is toward short commercials of two minutes or less pulled from infomercials, because companies can still reach huge audiences and spend less on air time, since buying short spots on stations is cheaper and more flexible. Another trend is airing American infomercials in foreign countries like Japan where the demand for American products is great.

Adams cautions, "I hope our success doesn't cause a lot of people to waste a lot of money. There's an awful lot more to it than meets the eye." 🏌️

BY ALENA BUBNIAK

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