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## HISTORY OF INFOMERCIALS

It all began in the 1980's. Ronald Regan was president and one of the many controversial things he did in that office was to deregulate the TV industry. Why did he do it? Well, as a conservative Republican he lived and breathed by the "free market rule," which stated that the government didn't belong in business, and businesses should live and die by the success or failure of their own practices and market forces.

At the same time, cable TV was just starting its expansion into the American television marketplace, and that opened up a huge broadcast venue which simply didn't exist beforehand. Anybody with any experience in the broadcast industry was starting his own channel and pretty soon cable channels were commonplace. The most successful channels at the time were religious based channels which were basically used for fundraising purposes. There were literally hundreds of them, from local, small time reverends and ministers with dubious backgrounds, to nationally broadcast spiritual and religious shows, utilizing well-known religious figures.

At this point, two things happened. For one, many of the young, fledgling channels and networks who counted on ad revenue to keep themselves afloat attracted less than stellar ratings and starting going under. And at the same time, the religious channels started to realize that their fundraising efforts were failing miserably in the late evening and wee hours of the morning.

Cheap broadcast space was born! And enterprising businessmen, more like vultures than saviors, swooped down and began to chew on the dying carcasses of the young cable industry, buying up blocks of cheap, late night, off peak broadcast time and running 30 minute or 60 minute, inexpensively produced commercials refashioned as entertainment programs.

Pretty soon there were infomercial superstars. Celebrities, as well as a cast of unknowns, found fame and fortune in the newly created infomercial industry. There was Jane Fonda who captured lightening in a bottle with her exercise tapes simultaneously boosting the video business along with the infomercial business. There was Ron Popeil, who marketed every gadget and device people didn't even know they needed and made the switch from printed contact to electronic contact so successfully he's still doing it today. And there was Kenny Kingston who made the Psychic Hotline into one of the largest businesses in the world without even having anything to sell! Only in America and only in infomercials could such overwhelming success happen so quickly.

Soon, everybody with an idea was trying to come up with the next big thing. As is always the case with any new industry, immediately following the initial success there comes a huge wave of imitators and innovators trying to cash in. And as always happens – most fail. There was such a huge crush of wannabes flooding into the business that production rates skyrocketed and broadcast time became more and more expensive and less and less available. Almost overnight, the infomercial industry went from nothing to today's enviable haul of billions of dollars annually. And that's just in America. Successful infomercials, like Hollywood movies are translated into foreign languages and played all around the globe especially when they are celebrity driven.

The newly created infomercial industry was the precursor to the Home Shopping Network and QVC which are essentially 24 hour mini infomercials, product driven, price driven and celebrity driven. And now we have The Infomercial Channel – 24 hours a day of infomercials. Gone are the days of loud mouthed hucksters, snake oil salesmen yelling into the camera, hawking the latest "it slices! it dices!" home improvement device. Today, infomercials are slick, expensive and if they work, highly profitable.

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