



Reality Marketing

Pool pro creates TV program about his company

BY JIM RAPOSA

MIGUEL ANGEL MERCADO, OWNER OF OCEAN GALLERY USA in El Paso, Texas, is equal parts entrepreneur, marketer and P.T. Barnum. Barnum knew how to create attention for his business endeavors and utilize what he called “printer’s ink” (the press) to his advantage. Mercado has assembled that puzzle by merging reality television with brokered (paid) TV airtime.

The concept presented itself during a family trip to Las Vegas 20 years ago. “The main leg of my business, at the beginning, was building and leasing aquariums,” Mercado says. “The person who planted the seed of a reality show in me was Wayne King [star of the Animal Planet TV series “Tanked”]. During that trip, I wondered if there was anyone building aquariums [in Vegas]. So I flipped through the phone book and found Acrylic Tank Manufacturing (ATM). I spoke with Wayne and told him what I was doing in El Paso. He wanted to meet and invited me to his shop.”

The two befriended each other and King taught Mercado how to build the large tanks for which King’s firm is known. After “Tanked” started airing, Mercado says he’d watch Wayne and his crew building tanks for celebrities and thought, “Hey, we’re building high-end pools, aquariums and water features for a very affluent clientele here in El Paso. There’s lots of crazy, entertaining and funny stuff that happens each day.’ I looked at my wife and said, ‘We should do a reality show, too!’”

Mercado says his church, The Abundant Living Faith Center in El Paso, has an amazing media production department for pastor Charles Nieman. “I met with Raoul Mendoza, who ran the media department,” he says. “Under his direction and with help from some of the media crew at church, we planned, shot and

edited our first episode.”

Getting the show on TV was the next hurdle. The program concept caught the attention of KFOX-14, the local FOX affiliate. A paid reality show was unheard of. Most paid TV programming is produced in an infomercial format; KFOX-14 would only air the show if Mercado bought the airtime.

Mercado had to come up with cash or kill his idea. “Airtime is costly, even on local TV,” Mercado says. “After we shot and edited the first episode, I went out and got my own sponsors. We shot commercials for them, and they essentially paid for the airtime. Their phones rang with new business just as ours did, so it was a win/win scenario.” There’s a lesson here, even if you don’t produce your own reality show. Teaming up with noncompeting businesses to defray marketing costs for print, online and broadcast marketing is smart.

The idea worked — and the show, “Extreme Waterworks,” gave the station fresh entertainment programming done locally, a rarity in local TV aside from news. It also brought the station revenue from the airtime purchase. Mercado and Ocean Gallery USA developed a larger following — and more business — as the show began attracting a regular audience and ratings.

Mercado recently signed a national production deal for his show with a well-known reality TV show producer. Somewhere, Barnum is smiling! ■

▲ Clips from “Extreme Waterworks,” the reality TV show Mercado developed to promote his business.

Read more about Mercado and his business on page 24.



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