

## 'dLifeTV' Enjoying Setup With CNBC

**| Cable | Diabetes Show Borders on Infomercial**

**By Wayne Friedman**

*Special to TelevisionWeek*

It is one of the higher-rated shows on CNBC on Sunday nights, according to the show's producer. It carries the CNBC video bug in the bottom corner of the screen. But it is not a CNBC show, and CNBC is not responsible for its content.

It is called "dLifeTV" and is billed as "Information, Inspiration, and Connection for your Diabetes Life." It uses a talk show format packaged with targeted commercials to reach the estimated 14 million Americans with some form of diabetes and their families. By the standards of other CNBC shows or most infomercials it is a runaway success, said the show's producer, Howard Steinberg, CEO of privately held LifeMed Media, based in Connecticut. He said "dLifeTV" averages about 581,000 viewers per show. That data comes from special Nielsen telephone surveys, financed by LifeMed, called "coincidentals," taken March 27, April 3 and April 10. That figure, he said, includes 306,000



HOWARD STEINBERG

"diabetic households"—in which at least one member of the household is diabetic.

That would be more than five times the viewership of CNBC's regularly scheduled Sunday night shows, such as "Wall Street Journal Report," which averages about 100,000 viewers, according to a CNBC spokeswoman.

CNBC isn't familiar with the "coincidental" data but said in examining more mainstream Nielsen People Meter data, "dLifeTV" attracts about 88,000 viewers, the spokeswoman said. "dLife's" viewership, she said, is not factored into any of the network's Nielsen viewing data for its daypart ratings. TV research executives say telephone coincidentals can be very accurate because they ask viewers which shows they are watching at the time of the phone call—resulting in fewer errors, they believe. Other research executives say such surveys are meaningless because research standards vary widely for each survey.

"Nielsen People Meter data is the currency that advertisers work with,"



**LET'S TALK DIABETES** Mother Love, left, Jim Turner, J. Anthony Brown and Nicole Johnson Baker chat during a "dLifeTV" taping in May. The program looks like a typical talk show, complete with commercials.

said Jack Loftus, VP of communications for Nielsen Media Research. "Coincidentals are a snapshot in time. It is not like the people meters, which have an ongoing panel."

Mr. Loftus said coincidentals are used more to gauge interest in a TV show rather than to obtain concrete viewership data. "They are used for marketing," he said.

The show is structured to look like a regular half-hour talk show, complete with commercials. Mr. Steinberg said advertisers are not sold purely on its telephone ratings survey. Rather, marketers are sold an overall deal that includes a radio show, online exposure and other marketing elements.

Similar to an infomercial, LifeMed pays CNBC for the time and controls all content and commercials. However, the producers and network insist it is not an infomercial. CNBC does run infomercials Sundays from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. (ET), before "dLifeTV" goes on the air for a half-hour.

The CNBC spokeswoman called it a "time buy." In TV that is a term for

programs that buy their way onto a network, typically sports events or occasionally a drama packaged by an advertiser. Sometimes the network is involved, but in this case, CNBC has no connection to “dLifeTV.”

There are no product placements in “dLifeTV.” The show’s advertisers include Abbott Diabetes Care, which sells glucose-monitoring equipment, Atkins Nutritionals, Drugstore.com, Roche Pharmaceuticals and Novo Nordisk, which makes insulin. Typically, eight or nine 30-second commercials run in each half hour show. Mr. Steinberg, who has no previous experience in television, said the producers sell the ads in packages that cost from several hundred thousand dollars to more than \$1 million for a series of shows.

“We want to be seen as a program — not as an infomercial,” Mr. Steinberg said, adding that diabetes care products are a \$140 billion business.

He said the show, which has been on the air since March, is serving major consumer and advertiser needs. LifeMed was formed about two years ago.

Mr. Steinberg said “dLife’s” success rests with the 14 million people in the U.S. with diabetes. He said this audience has few TV resources and is eager for diabetes news. Mr. Steinberg himself has had diabetes since he was 10 years old. The inclusion on the screen of a CNBC “bug”—the network’s brand logo—seems to suggest CNBC’s editorial approval. That is not the case. Mr. Steinberg said use of the

bug was part of the show’s contractual agreement with CNBC.

While claiming it is not an infomercial, CNBC runs a disclaimer that notes the show’s producers—not CNBC—are responsible for the content, just as it does with other paid programming and infomercials it carries.

Mr. Steinberg said “dLifeTV” must achieve a specific rating level to stay on the air, but he declined to provide details. He would not say how much LifeMed pays CNBC or what the channel charges for advertising. Typically, a half-hour of bought program time on CNBC can be priced at anywhere from \$50,000 to \$100,000, depending on the show.

**“We want to be seen as a program — not as an infomercial.”**

Howard Steinberg, CEO, LifeMed Marketing

“dLifeTV,” which has produced six episodes so far, will soon start running another six originals and will run more new episodes in 2006, he said. Among the

media personalities who are advisers or producers are

Film and TV director producer Jerry Zucker, Turner Broadcasting’s David Levy, advertising and syndication executive Michael Kassan, TiVo Vice Chairman Tom Rogers and former MSNBC President Erik Sorenson, who is executive producer of “dLifeTV,” Mr. Steinberg said. Given the success of the show, Mr. Steinberg said, he is looking into other broad-reaching ailments, such as heart disease, as content for similar TV shows.