



# Montel Can Sell

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Posted April 14, 2009

After a successful daytime talk show and a long battle against multiple sclerosis, Montel Williams is turning to sales. He'll be appearing on TV promoting his own branded health products, and despite less than favorable economic conditions, he's hoping you'll buy them.

He had a brief stint as a star in last year's commercials for the Obama Coin Collection (regular quarters, half-dollar and dollar coins covered in stickers with the president's picture) and has written eight books about health and wellness. Williams will be back on TV soon to introduce nine products under the Living Well with Montel brand, including comfort items, kitchen gadgets and age-defying supplements.

"I'm trying to teach people that, no matter what's going on with you, you can still thrive and flourish," says Williams.

## The Products

In the coming weeks, Williams will begin to advertise a number of items produced by Tristar Products, known for earlier hits like the Jack Lalane Juicer and the Ab Roller. Among other things, Montel's product line will include:

- **The Toasty Wrap** (\$19.95 plus shipping and handling), a Snuggie-like product. If you've been living sans TV and Internet for the past six months, the Snuggie is the most famous blanket with sleeves.
- **The Living Well with Montel Rotisserie** (\$89.97), a toaster-sized contraption with removable and dishwasher-safe parts designed to lock in the natural juices of fresh and frozen foods. You can cook and drain off fat from meat, vegetables, and "guiltless potatoes," according to the product description. But for those who are cutting carbs, there's nothing guiltless about potatoes, sour cream or not.
- **The Living Well branded Healthmaster** emulsifying blender, an idea spurred by his own diet, 70% of which consists of liquefied or emulsified food. Montel claims the emulsifier will help you increase your energy, improve vitality, lose weight and save money. For \$149.97 plus shipping and handling, you'll get a polycarbonate plastic, eight-speed, two-horsepower blender, which, with a little friction and noise, can also heat up soups as you blend them.

But what about quality? Last year, Tristar recalled 13,500 of its "Hulk Hogan's Ultimate Grill" electric contact grills which could catch fire when cooking oils were used before preheating, and 5,000 Steam Buggy Deluxe steam cleaners in 2004 that posed a burn hazard, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. But Williams's blender and rotisserie do come with a 60-day money back guarantee.

Williams is also selling an anti-aging supplement, **Protandim**, through one of his many web sites.

## Talk Marketing

Working with TriStar Products, the second largest infomercial company (and the company responsible for the Obama coins), Williams will appear in a series of “talkmercials” presenting an everyday problem to a studio audience and proposing one of his products as the solution.

And selling with his talk show star power could actually work, even amid weak consumer spending, simply because of the entertainment value of talkmercials. Marketers hope talkmercials will hook more viewers than home shopping channels.

“Shopping channels will likely need to improve the entertainment value of their shows to bring in a wider audience,” according to a January report on in-home shopping from Mintel, a firm that studies consumer behavior and competitive marketing strategies. “Most would probably argue that home shopping channels offer limited or no entertainment value.” In a recent survey, Mintel found that 40% of TV-watchers interviewed said they don’t watch home shopping channels because they’re boring and 33% said they don’t because the salespeople are “fake and annoying.”

And with 17 years as a TV talk show host, his appeal to the masses could make the hybrid talkmercial format a massive success.

## A History in Health

Prior to his work selling his own branded products, and before a new radio show, Montel Across America, debuted on April 6, Williams was known initially for his TV talk show, The Montel Williams Show, which ended last year.

After being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis nearly 10 years ago, and during the last few years of his TV talk show, Williams was also a spokesman for the Partnership for Prescription Assistance “Help is Here” bus tour. The tour aimed to teach the public about drug company-funded programs to provide free or low-cost drugs to the poor.

“I used to be one of the most adamant and angry people,” says Williams about his stance on the pharmaceuticals industry. “I realized there were some egregious offenses in the past...that they were poisoning people,” but now, after drugs with harmful side effects have been warned about or pulled from the market, “that industry has to be vindicated when they’re right,” Williams says.

When he was known mostly as a television talk show host, Williams says he’d get the expected shout-outs on the street from fans, but after his PPA bus tour, “They’d say, ‘Montel, thank you for saving my mama’s life.’”

But although the PPA has provided about 5.7 million patients will free or cheap prescription drugs, pharmaceutical companies continue to price drugs at rates unmanageable to many patients who don’t qualify for the PPA’s assistance. That includes many of the 46 million who, according to the Census Bureau, are uninsured.

For those without adequate health care, Williams offers the Living Well Card, a discount card that provides benefits such as 60% off prescription drugs, 50% off dental services, discounts on health care supplies and access to TelaDoc physicians, for a monthly fee of for \$9.95 to \$19.95 per month.

### **A Holistic Approach**

When he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a painful and debilitating autoimmune condition that attacks the central nervous system, Williams did his research and decided on a multifaceted treatment regimen combining Western medicine, Eastern medicine and hormone treatments. It was “not affordable or normal [protocol], but a risk I was willing to take,” he says.

“When people go to the doctor, they’re like lemmings,” taking a doctor's word for the truth, Williams says. But when Williams’s doctors predicted a poor prognosis, he disagreed.

Although many of Williams’s own doctors doubted the success of his holistic treatment approach, the progression of his illness is half or less than half that of patients on traditional treatments, he says. And each product that’s part of the Living Well brand, according to Williams, addresses a different aspect of a similar holistic perspective.