



Creating ways to beat zapping

By LOUIS CHUNOVIC

At a time when more viewers than ever are zapping or tuning out commercials, some advertisers are looking beyond 30-second spots to new models of participation in programming, whether it's show ownership, product placement, interstitial content, sponsorship or even overall time-block sponsorships. "We're looking for new ways to reach the viewer more effectively than we can right now," said Mel Berning, president of U.S. broadcast for Bcom3 Group MediaVest Worldwide, New York.

Case in point: Media-Vest is exploring the possibility of taking a high-concept TV movie with strong teen appeal and using it as the basis for production of a new limited-run summer series that would be an attractive vehicle for several of its major clients.

The rationale: For the network, it presents a relatively low-cost way to bring first-run programming to younger-demo viewers, who are always difficult to reach, especially in the hot-weather months. For advertisers, it is not only a sponsorship opportunity but also a way to integrate the client's products into program content. Advertisers also benefit because they often retain revenue-participation rights in additional runs and get greater backend participation than usual.

The goal: Amortize the investment and put clients' products into a "water-cooler buzz" environment. "There are really two marketplaces that we live in right now," said Mr. Berning, "One is the commodity marketplace, where we all do business 52 weeks a year. There also is a marketplace where we look for certain properties that we can identify as terrific environments for our brands, where we get the product integrations and the sponsorships."

Another example is that Capital One has developed a series of interstitial programming elements such as home-improvement and decoration vignettes that air on HGTV and a series of food preparation and recipe tips that will air on the Food Network in the second and third quarters. Each vignette will include a billboard, a 30-second tip and the Capital One creative.

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