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ABSOLUT HUNK: STORY OF A WILDLY SUCCESSFUL PRODUCT PLACEMENT

Make-believe Ad on 'Sex and the City' Creates Real-Life Sensation
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NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- Absolut Spirits hit the product-placement mother lode last week when its iconic vodka advertising was featured as part of a story line in HBO's *Sex and the City*.



The deal, which did not involve any money changing hands, came together following negotiations between the show's producers at HBO, Absolut and its entertainment agency, Ketchum.

Creating a fictional campaign

Ad agency TBWA/Chiat/Day, New York, which, like Ketchum, is part of Omnicom Group, was drafted to create a campaign tailored specifically for the scriptwriters' needs. The agency came up with a billboard ad showing PR-maven Samantha Jones' struggling actor boyfriend positioned with an Absolut bottle between his legs, with the tagline "Absolut Hunk."

"This is product placement taken to new heights," said Patrick O'Neill, TBWA's group creative director, who said he was inspired by poster campaigns from the '70s featuring Farrah Fawcett in a swimsuit and Burt Reynolds on a shaggy rug.

Digital alterations

Mr. O'Neill said the agency digitally altered the photo to remove actor Jason Lewis' love handles and to obscure a more graphic view that could be seen behind the bottle.

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The ad appeared on a New York bus stop, but its appearance within the show as a Times Square billboard was added digitally. *Sex and the City* message boards on the HBO Web site were full of folks – male and female – asking for copies of the "Absolut Hunk" image. Swedish photographer Peter Gehrke, who usually does the photography for the ad campaign, shot the ads.

One of Mr. O'Neill's other ideas for the ads included putting Mr. Lewis in a bubbly bathtub with a cherry in his mouth, the Absolut bottle shape seen in the suds. He was asked to come up with something that would create a bit more controversy.

Not a typical Absolute ad

Absolut's vice president of marketing, Jim Goodwin, said the company leapt at the opportunity to be part of the show. "If we'd dithered it would have been gone," he said. And while it has opted against running the campaign itself, it will capitalize on the huge publicity. "It is not exactly consistent with the campaign, not to mention a bit salacious," Mr. Goodwin said, who added that the company plans to extend the shelf life of the placement by creating recipe cards for a new Absolut Hunk cocktail.

The experience has given Absolut a new appetite for product placement for its vodka. Absolut will also appear in a music video from Nelly and Brian McKnight, coincidentally named "All Night Long."

