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ON THE WEB

## A Word From Our Sponsor? He's Here Now!

By STUART ELLIOTT

Who wears the pants on *The Best Damn Sports Show Period*? Why, the advertisers,



literally and figuratively. In the latest example of how television programming and advertising are becoming increasingly indistinguishable, Levi Strauss & Company paid for an actor featured in a commercial for its Dockers pants brand to appear on the show on Fox Sports Net, a cable TV channel owned by the News Corporation and Cablevision Systems.



To demonstrate the new Dockers stain-resistant Go Khaki pants, the actor, Ted Mattison, appeared as a guest on the Friday episode of the show, which presents testosterone-fueled news, commentary and comedy skits in the style of a sports-talk radio program. Mr. Mattison was part of a skit centered on a bachelor party for a cast member, the comedian Tom Arnold. The Go Khaki commercial with Mr. Mattison — which also takes place during a bachelor party — ran after the skit ended.

The appearance was part of an advertising package bought by Levi Strauss from Fox Sports Net that included commercial time on the show as well as other programs on the channel. The deal also provides Dockers apparel for Mr. Arnold and other cast members. Neither the advertiser nor the network would discuss the terms of the deal, which was estimated to be in the six figures.

In the show, the host, Chris Rose, who also plays host for the bachelor party for Mr. Arnold, introduces Mr. Mattison by describing him as "the Dockers Go Khaki Stain Defender pants guy in commercials." Mr. Mattison comes out and pretends to insult Mr. Arnold, who retaliates by throwing a drink at Mr. Mattison's pants.

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Dockers is one of several brands that are being woven into the content of various episodes of *The Best Damn Sports Show Period*, and viewers are not told the appearances are part of advertising arrangements.

Twice a month, Outback Steakhouse brings dinner onto the show for the cast. Three times a week, a bar is erected on the set to help peddle a malt beverage, Mike's Hard Lemonade, sold by Mark Anthony Brands.

"What we are doing is really immersing products into programs," says Guy Sousa, executive vice president of advertising sales, Fox Cable Sports.

Last fall, the show recreated highlights in the graphic formats of the Microsoft Xbox and other video game systems. And Quizno's duplicated one of its sandwich shops on the stage, complete with a chef making toasted subs for the cast to eat.

"What we are doing is really immersing products into programs," said Guy Sousa, executive vice president of advertising sales at Fox Cable Sports, "so that they really feel like it is part of the show."

On a Fox Sports Net sibling, Fox Broadcasting, products of two advertisers, Coca-Cola and Ford Motor, turn up during weekly episodes of a popular new reality series, *American Idol*.

A \$1 billion deal between the Walt Disney Company and OMD, the media agency owned by the Omnicom Group, may include the placement of sponsors' products in episodes of series on networks like ABC and ESPN.

Also, the trade publication Advertising Age reported last week that the Bravo cable network wants to replace pitchers of water glimpsed next to guests on the interview series *Inside the Actors Studio* with branded bottled water a sponsor would supply.

According to the networks, advertisers and agencies, integrated marketing programs are now necessary to capture the attention of jaded, fickle consumers who can easily tune out the traditional 30-second commercial.

"We're always thinking about new ways to break through with our consumer," said Bill Stewart, vice president for marketing for the Dockers brand at Levi Strauss in San Francisco.

"It's got to fit naturally into the show and be entertaining, but never misleading," he added. "The men who wear Dockers love the brand, and we're not going to do anything that risks that relationship."