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The **ORION** Report

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Making the Brand—Not the Talent— the Star of Outdoor TV

ARE YOU GROWING A HOST'S BRAND OR YOUR OWN?

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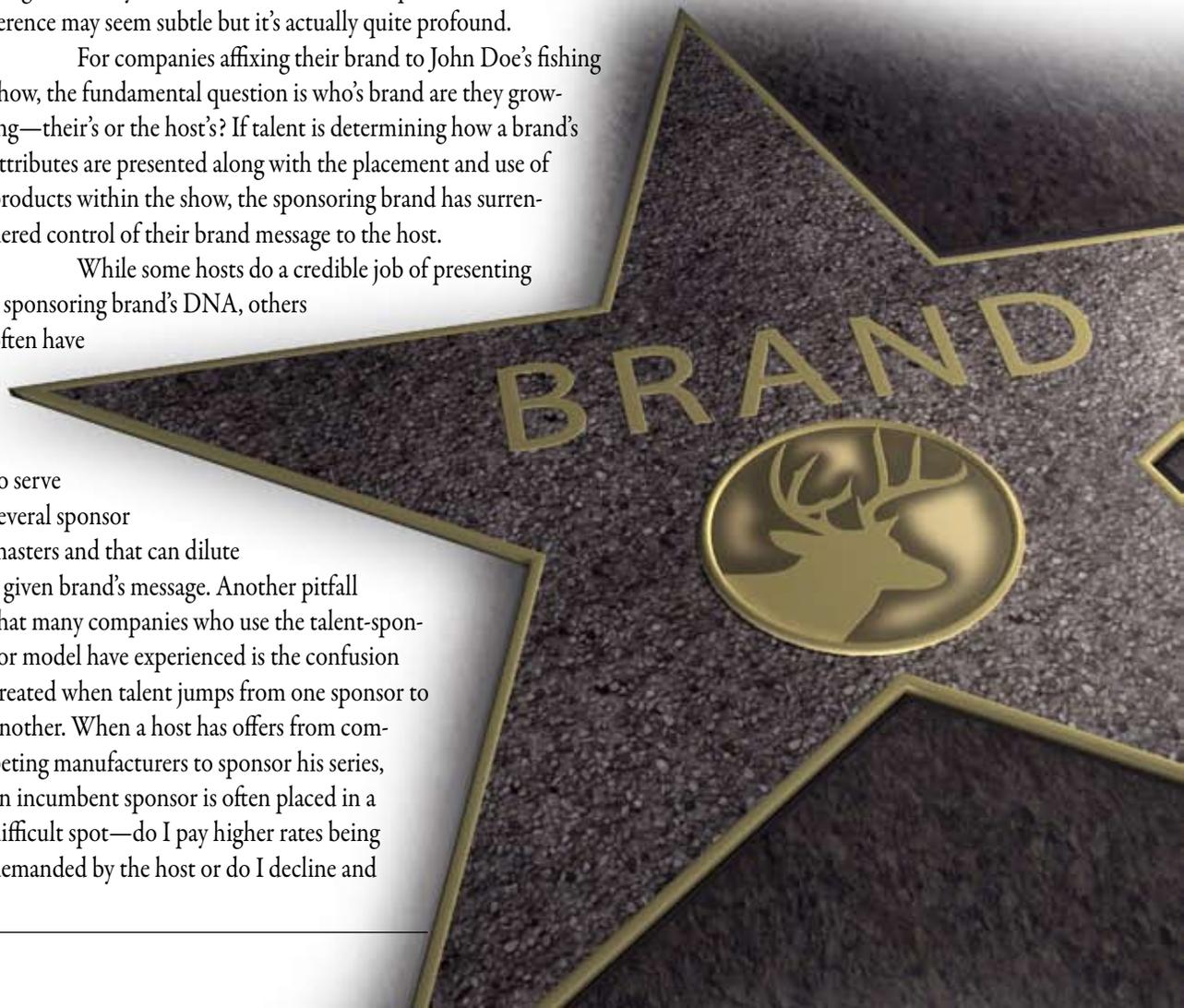


Two distinctly different paths have developed in the world of branded entertainment on outdoor television. The first is where outdoor manufacturers—especially in the fishing industry—have opted to attach their brand to tournament anglers who have become TV show hosts. That is, 'John Doe's Fishing Adventures' is brought to you by brand 'X'. The other distinct trail, most often taken by hunting and shooting manufacturers, is to create programs solely focused on their brand and product lines. The difference may seem subtle but it's actually quite profound.

For companies affixing their brand to John Doe's fishing show, the fundamental question is who's brand are they growing—their's or the host's? If talent is determining how a brand's attributes are presented along with the placement and use of products within the show, the sponsoring brand has surrendered control of their brand message to the host.

While some hosts do a credible job of presenting a sponsoring brand's DNA, others often have

to serve several sponsor masters and that can dilute a given brand's message. Another pitfall that many companies who use the talent-sponsor model have experienced is the confusion created when talent jumps from one sponsor to another. When a host has offers from competing manufacturers to sponsor his series, an incumbent sponsor is often placed in a difficult spot—do I pay higher rates being demanded by the host or do I decline and



BRAND

surrender the equity that I've built in the host and his series through years of sponsorship to a competitor? It's a difficult place for a sponsor to be but this is an all-too-common scenario that puts brand managers in a tough spot. We frequently hear this complaint from manufacturers who are looking for better ways to grow their television marketing efforts without losing control of their brand and key marketing platforms like a TV series.

This brings us to the second branded entertainment model which entails a sponsor developing its own series based expressly on its brand and the features and benefits of its product lines. This is the model widely

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embraced by the hunting and shooting industries. That is, company 'X' creates a series concept (not a host) and then seeks the services of a host or hosts to serve as a conduit for the brand's messaging—always retaining control of the series and its content and quality of production. Another key advantage to this from a manufacturer's perspective is the ability to create series elements that can live on a wide variety of existing and emerging video-based marketing platforms, like video-on-demand, in-store networks, trade show convention hotel promos, corporate Web sites, continuity marketing programs with membership organizations, and others. Essentially, as part of the series development process, sales and marketing tools also are created to populate as many available marketing channels as possible (like video-on-demand, streaming Web video, point of purchase promos, etc.) all the while allowing the brand to control all elements.

Many companies using this model opt to retain several series hosts—a pro-staff of sorts—that each carry the brand's message. This allows the sponsor to more easily replace talent who decide to move on to other series or simply drift from hosting gigs all together. Very often, these same field hosts are contributors to other marketing mediums like magazines, newspapers, blogs, and even radio shows. It's common, then, for such pro-staff members to amplify a brand's message through these other channels—yet another value-added component to this TV series model.

When sorting through the ways to go to market via branded entertainment, it's important to step back and understand the fundamental purpose of this kind of marketing in the first place. The idea, of course, is to showcase a brand's DNA in a memorable way that speaks to its redeeming elements like quality, service, integrity, good corporate citizenship, and the like. This is messaging that should be infused into each episode, constantly reinforcing these attributes that foster affinity among consumers and creates separation in the marketplace between the featured brand and its competitors. This is achieved through all phases of a series production including selecting a host (or hosts) that complement brand attributes—an articulate, likeable spokesman with credibility in the subject matter who both looks and sounds the part (a host with a heavy regional accent, for example, may not appeal across a brand's entire geographic market).

The caliber of production, too, is key here, for it is counterproductive to try and tell consumers about the high quality and top performance of your brand and product lines when your TV series looks like the home video amateur hour. Consumers come to judge the caliber of your brand through all phases of your communication with them: TV series and commercials, catalog production, Web site execution, point of purchase collateral, product packaging, print ads, and the like. If any of these areas are inconsistent in message, imagery, and quality it will confuse consumers and negatively impact a consumer's view of your brand.

So do you spend your TV dollars with an existing host and his series or grow your own program and talent association with your brand? That's the question that each company must answer with an eye toward maximum return on investment and risk mitigation.

Orion Multimedia produces 21 series for VERSUS and other networks along with numerous specials on a wide range of field sports and natural history subjects. Orion's team of producers, writers, editors, animators, and cinematographers have won 12 national Emmy awards -- more than the rest of the outdoor production industry combined. Orion's state-of-the-art HD broadcast division is complemented by full-service agency and sales solutions groups that offer the industry's only fully integrated, self-contained marketing solutions organization.