

CBS and Pepsi bring video ads to printed page

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When some readers of Entertainment Weekly open their magazines next month, they will discover characters from US television programmes speaking to them from a wafer-thin video screen built into the page.

The marketing experiment – which is being conducted by CBS, the US broadcaster, and Pepsi, the soft drinks maker – recalls the fantasy newspapers of the Harry Potter films and works much like a singing greetings card, with the video starting once a reader turns the appropriate page.

The cost of the full-motion video ad was not disclosed, but it will be far more expensive than traditional print ads, according to executives familiar with the technology, developed by a US company called Americhip.

The willingness to spend on such a promotion highlights the radical means marketers are employing to reach consumers at a time when a growing number of people are using new technologies such as digital video recorders to avoid ads.

“It’s part of the future – a way to engage consumers in new and surprising ways,” said George Schweitzer, president of CBS marketing group. “How do you sample a drink? You give them a taste.”

In the Harry Potter films, the “Daily Prophet” newspaper has pictures that move. The ad in Entertainment Weekly will feature characters from several Monday night offerings on CBS, as well as a video promoting a Pepsi diet cola for men.

The video, which will play on a screen about the size of those found on mobile telephones, will appear in copies of the Time Warner magazine sent to subscribers in the New York and Los Angeles areas.

Entertainment Weekly has a circulation of 1.8m, but it had not been decided how many copies will contain the video ad.

One magazine industry executive with knowledge of the technology estimated that running one video ad in 100,000 copies would cost in the low seven-figure range. That would translate into a cost of several dollars per copy. By contrast, a full-page colour ad in Entertainment Weekly costs about 9 cents a page per copy.

The goal of CBS, the US broadcaster, and Pepsi, the soft drink maker, which are paying for the promotion jointly, is that the ads will generate sufficient “buzz” about their products to justify the high costs of the high-tech advertisement.

Esquire, a men’s magazine published by Hearst, last year created a cover for its 75th anniversary issue built with an E Ink screen, the same technology used in Amazon.com’s Kindle reader, which generated significant attention in a currently moribund sector.

Financial Times, London, Aug. 19th 2009, Media, online.