

Advertainment is sneaking into music, movies, TV and more.

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By Scott G (The G-Man)

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Barcodes in commercials, wristwatch credit cards, and bathroom broadcasts are just some of the changes we're going to see as advertising keeps on blending with entertainment – a Report by Scott G (The G-Man).

The very name "advertainment" sends thrilling vibrations up the spine of anyone with marketing in their blood or communication in their genes. And it produces a strong shiver of disgust from many of my colleagues in the music industry.

"I don't want my songs to be involved in advertising," they say, forgetting entirely that by wearing branded running shoes, a t-shirt hawking Fender guitars and a baseball cap emblazoned with the Peavey logo, their very lives are involved in advertising. Plus, if they attend an awards show, they happily state the brand and designer names of everything they're wearing.

They further ignore the fact that radio itself is a form of advertainment. What gets played has little to do with musical accomplishment or artistic merit, but is directly related to the backing of large corporate distributors. I have been told to budget anywhere from a quarter of a million dollars to \$350,000 in promotional costs to obtain national radio play on (the appropriately-named) commercial radio stations. Is it any wonder that corporations are seeking ways to build a little brand awareness into the songs?

Turn on any rap, urban or hip hop station and you can start counting the product mentions in the lyrics, some paid-for, some just happenstance. In the electronic-pop field, I have done it myself. On my "Electro Bop" album are songs such as "Paranormal Radio" (which begins as a documentary about American Technology Corporation's HyperSonic Sound system), "Sheena Sez" (about talk radio host Sheena Metal), and "Check the Tech" (about the joys of watching the TechTV channel).

Has this advertainment hurt acceptance of the album? Not that I've noticed. Many e-mails from around the world cite "Paranormal Radio" as their favorite track. Not one person has complained about the ad messages, I assume because the audience for my dance-oriented music is pleased to receive information about technology and a far-out rock-talk jock such as Ms. Metal.

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Ads and entertainment go hand-in-wallet in many other ways, some pretty strange. In music alone, we have all wondered about Bob Dylan's "Love Sick" in Victoria's Secret commercials (not to mention Mr. D himself smirking between shots of the lovely bodies wearing the lingerie). But don't overlook Keith Richards in the "Cover Girl" ad while "Honky Tonk Women" plays, or Willie Nelson's "Red Headed Stranger" in the Herbal Essence spot, or Iggy Pop's liquor/drug/sex-soaked "Lust for Life" blasting throughout the Royal Caribbean commercials. (Love to work with the Account Executive who was able to sell that concept!) By contrast, Sting crooning from the back seat of a Jaguar seems a very model of demographic compatibility.

And that's the point: ads and public relations are routinely dismissed as silly, annoying, intrusive or a waste of time right up to the moment when they are delivering facts the reader or listener wants. Then,

suddenly, the sponsored message is viewed as helpful and instructive. Therefore, the trick is to achieve the right match between audience and message.

One problem is choosing your media. Just listing advertising outlets can be daunting: TV, radio, outdoor, newspapers, magazines, transit, direct mail, Internet banner. Many of these have subsets: paid inserts (advertorial) in newspapers and magazines, sponsored "newsbreaks" and infomercials on broadcast media, static or animated announcements at stadia, those dreaded 'Net pop-ups, brand names on sports uniforms and equipment (can you say NASCAR?), etc.

One of the most enjoyable categories for producers of both music and advertising is viral 'Net marketing, which has had some notable success stories such as BMW Films, the Seinfeld AmEx campaign, and of course, Burger King's Subservient Chicken.

We haven't even considered cooperative advertising, which can be anything from myriad logos at the bottom of an event poster to the branded music tones and flashing-light Intel trademark that ends every other commercial for someone else's computer products.

But it extends further. Consider: Magazines that sell cover stories; product placement in movies and TV (and yes, live theater); branded clothing; bumper stickers; even fliers stuck on parked cars. There are ad messages on private automobiles (and those anti-humanistic trucks that some insist are called SUVs). Pull up behind a vehicle in traffic and you can read an ad for the car dealership on the license plate frame, plus another piece of public relations for the state on the plate itself. (Come on, you don't think it's hype to put "Land of enchantment" on every vehicle licensed in the state of New Mexico?)

You might think that this plethora of options makes it easier for firms to get their messages across to their targeted demographics, but a good case can be made for the opposite view. TV audiences are turning to Tivo and pay-per-view. Radio audiences are discovering XM and Sirius Satellite Radio. Newspaper readership is becoming an oxymoron. Motion picture audiences can be heard groaning, mocking or booing the pre-feature commercials.

This means there are a lot of people working on new ways to get the product benefits into the brains of the consumers. I do it with humorous radio scripts and subliminally seductive music, but there are going to be some innovations in our industry, and at the risk of appearing foolish, I'm going to make a

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few predictions. Within the next few years, we'll see:

- \* Debit card scanners in TV sets, so you can order during a commercial with the flick of your remote.
- \* Barcodes in songs, so you can download from iTunes by swiping your XM or Sirius player with your Visa or MasterCard.
- \* Credit cards built into wristwatches, so your "plastic money" is always close at hand.
- \* Links to product sites in every scene of DVD movies or computer games. Do you want the shoes in the Tony Hawk Pro Skater game? Click-click-click and they're on their way to you via FedEx (note product placement for the big competitor to United Parcel Service).
- \* Broadcasts of infotainment and advertainment will pop up everywhere: in public restrooms, at the Starbucks, at traffic signals, at the gas pump, on your mailbox, in the packages you purchase, in the parcels that arrive at your door, etc.
- \* Captive broadcasts. Just as you can preview the music on packaged CDs (available in EU now, but coming soon to the USA), the product benefits, price points and warranty information will play as soon as you lift up a product in the store.
- \* Digitized logo placement in the rebroadcasts of syndicated TV shows ("Hey, we can sell the product

placement another three times!")

- \* Branded ingredient lists on menus.
- \* Corporate artwork that takes you on a virtual tour of the company.
- \* Interactive ads, where you get to play Jerry Seinfeld and/or Superman (or the driver of the BMW) in a five-minute escape from reality (and from reality TV).
- \* Holographic projections of commercials from postage stamps, car and house keys, magazine covers and ad pages, etc.

And these are just the changes we'll be seeing in the next few years. We're not even discussing the opportunities for advertainment once we move beyond traditional broadcast methodology; when microchips are embedded under your skin, YOU will be the receiver for TV, radio, satellite, telephone, and global positioning system signals. And at that point, the possibilities for marketing communication via advertainment are going to become truly mind-boggling.

Are these prospects exciting, frightening, or both? My view is positive. After all, a lot of these new forms of communication are going to need my scripts and my music.

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**UNLIMITED MUSIC GLOBAL ONLINE**

**By Knut R. Enebakk**

**UNLIMITED MUSIC GLOBAL ONLINE by Knut R. Enebakk**

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