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Hollywood

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'Freedom' rings for Staunton

By Tatiana Siegel

Imelda Staunton has signed on to play opposite Hilary Swank in Paramount Pictures and MTV Films' drama "Freedom Writers."



Staunton

The project marks one of Staunton's first high-profile roles since she earned critical raves and an Oscar nomination for last year's "Vera Drake." She also appears in Universal Pictures' children's fantasy "Nanny McPhee."

Based on a true story, "Freedom" centers on a teacher (Swank) at a gang-infested Long Beach, Calif., school who is faced with the daunting task of teaching freshman English

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Guilds place ad demands

Writers, actors want say, pay for product plugs

By Gail Schiller

The WGA and SAG on Monday went public with their demands that networks and producers give writers and actors a creative say and financial compensation for writing brands into story lines or appearing with them onscreen.

At a news conference at the WGA West's offices in Los Angeles, the guild issued a policy paper outlining its opposition to what it terms "stealth advertising" in film and television and detailing accounts of writers who claim they were forced to weave advertisers into story lines. The document also calls for an industry code of conduct governing product integration and warns that the WGA will file an official complaint with the FCC seeking tougher regulation of branded entertainment if networks and producers do not open negotiations with Hollywood unions on giving writers,

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A sign touting a travel agency on the soap "Marienhof" helped create a scandal.

Euros rethink branding

Easing of integration regs likely

By Charles Masters and Scott Roxborough

In Germany, TV executives are losing their jobs because of it. In the U.K., there have been allega-

tions involving BBC programming. In Italy, some suspect it might be happening, too.

Product placement on television — illegal in most European countries — has become a hot potato for channel bosses and producers, many of whom would welcome a change, or at least a clarification, of the rules.

With a relaxation of European Union regulations almost certain to be included in the revised Television Without Frontiers directive due to be unveiled next month, it

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between the lines



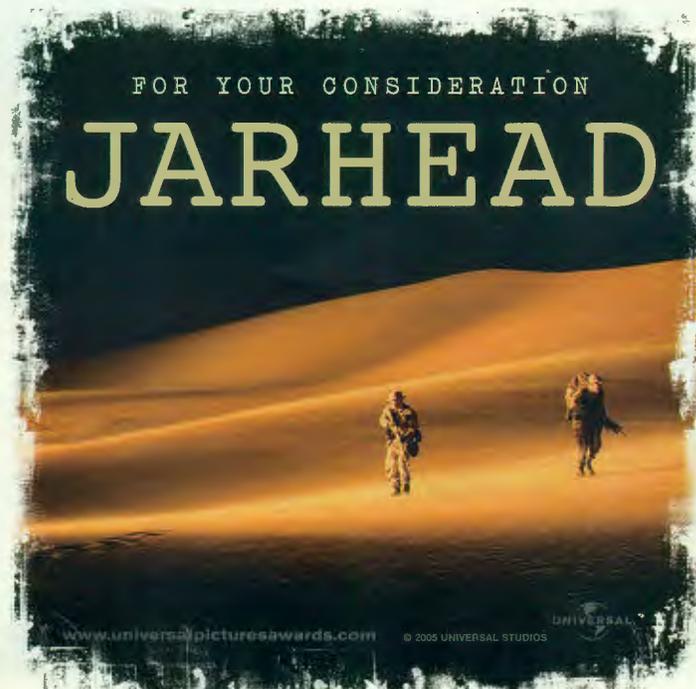
"Jarhead"

TOPICAL SOLUTION

After a lackluster summer, Hollywood is getting serious with a number of politically charged releases.

Kevin Cassidy reports.

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'Medium' stunt predicts future

By Nicole Sperling

Sony Pictures is betting that Patricia Arquette has some influence with moviegoers interested in seeing its upcoming Oscar contender "Memoirs of a Geisha." On Monday night, the Culver City-based studio, which

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Branding

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can't be long before the floodgates of integrated branding revenue open.

"Yes" to clear rules on product placement in works of fiction," EU media commissioner Viviane Reding said recently at film industry conference in France, though she said brand integration would remain banned in news programming, documentaries and children's programming in EU member states.

The cash bonanza once Europe joins the fray could be huge. In 2004, the value of overall TV product placements in the U.S. rose nearly 50%, to \$1.9 billion, according to research firm PQ Media.

Across the continent, the power of producers to resist the siren call of integrated branding appears to be weakening. The latest revelation in an ongoing German scandal comes from commercial broadcaster ProSiebenSat.1, which last month admitted to illegal product placement, saying advertisements disguised as news reports were slipped into breakfast TV shows and other programming on its Sat.1 channel. The group face fines of up to €500,000 (\$584,360) for their inclusion.

After the admission, ProSiebenSat.1 head Guillaume de Posch called for clearer EU guidelines as to what should and should not be allowed — a view echoed by Nicolas de Tavernost, chairman of French commercial channel M6.

"It'd be better to have a clear framework than to see what has happened in Germany," de Tavernost said.

The series of German scandals began with the exposure of illicit placement on such popular soaps as "Marienhof" and "Lindenstrasse" on pubcaster ARD and has led to several high-profile firings and resignations.

Leading German channel RTL also is under investigation for suspected product placement. RTL Television CEO Anke Schaeferkordt said that the network would welcome a more open policy toward product placement, adding that the real problem is the overall rigidity of current advertising regulations.

"Product placement has been made the focus in the public discussion, but for us a much more important issue are the traditional commercial blocks," Schaeferkordt said. "Right now we are tightly constrained as to how much commercial time we can air per hour and how we do it. That's what we want to change, to become more flexible."

The European Commission, the EU's executive body, seems likely to give broadcasters and marketers a freer reign as part of its TWF review.

Under existing EU rules, product placement is not outright banned, but "surreptitious advertising" or placements likely to mislead the public about their nature are outlawed. National law in some territories does stretch to an explicit ban.

Reding said new regulations will have to strike a balance

among protecting consumers against being misled, boosting the competitiveness of the European content industry and preserving the independence of editors. One condition will be that placement is clearly identified at the start of a program.

The European Group of Television Advertising said it welcomed the opportunity to formally recognize product placement.

"It is important that a legal base be provided as some EU governments interpret the current directive as forbidding product placement," the group said.

Despite the obvious potential for producers seeking new sources of finance, Germany's ARD said it will fight to maintain the ban on product placement whatever the EU decides.

But all the big commercial broadcasters have come out in favor of a loosening of the German rules to allow more U.S.-style freedom. Britain's commercial broadcasters also are keen to see the barriers to placement on domestically made shows dropped and are lobbying for change ahead of the TWF review.

In a September speech to European regulators and broadcast ministers, ITV chief executive Charles Allen said that product placement on British screens was nothing new.

"U.S. shows like '24,' 'Desperate Housewives' and 'Lost' have demonstrated, through their successful links with brands such as Ford and Sears, that there is a place for sensible and well thought-through product placement in the commercial TV mar-

ketplace," he said.

"Twenty years or so ago, both TV sponsorship and advertiser-funded programming were virtually nonexistent. We have been able to create, execute and regulate both, and both have benefited the viewer and the broadcast economy with their different contributions to the 'virtuous circle.' There is no reason why new techniques like product placement can't do the same," Allen said.

"It is a paradox and in my opinion unthinkable that films with product placement can be broadcast on television but that it is prohibited for (TV fiction programs) to seek product placement," said Michele Lofoco, an attorney and president of the rights department at financier Cinecitta Holding.

Two years ago, Italy introduced a law that loosened restrictions on product placement in film in the hope of opening untapped financial sources. The law immediately propelled cash-strapped Italy into the vanguard of product-placement-friendly European countries but left many scratching their heads as to why it did not extend to the small screen.

"This is not a question of law but a question of common sense," said Lofoco, who noted that the practice within television is likely going on anyway, albeit clandestinely.

Charles Masters reported from Paris; Scott Roxborough reported from Cologne, Germany. Mimi Turner in London, Leo Cendrowicz in Brussels and Peter Kiefer in Rome contributed to this report.

Stunts

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lacks its own network, partnered with NBC and its supernatural thriller series "Medium" to sell "Geisha" by making it part of the episode's story line.

In the episode, Arquette's character, Allison, finally got a much-needed night on the town with her husband, and the two decided to attend a special advance screening of "Geisha." When they arrived at the theater, not only was the film's title bantered on the marquee, but the couple also ran into two friends who had just seen the movie and loved it. And just to reinforce the film's title, throughout the episode Allison's daughter Bridgette kept asking for the defini-

tion of a geisha.

Sony negotiated the "Medium"- "Geisha" deal during the summer's upfront buy as part of its overall media plan with NBC. There was no promotional fee involved. Neither NBC nor Paramount Television were available for comment.

The "Medium" stunt is part of Sony's effort to find new outlets for its marketing campaigns. After suffering through a disappointing summer at the boxoffice, Sony has ramped up its creative advertising to boost its film offerings for the second half of the year.

"We are watching the erosion of commercial watching due to DVRs and TiVos, so we're trying our best to get out there," Sony president of worldwide market-

ing Geoff Ammer said. "We don't own a network, so there are promotional ways that we do it."

On Sept. 20, for example, Sony was the exclusive sponsor of FX's season premiere of its highly rated drama "Nip/Tuck," a stunt that cost the company a reported \$1.8 million. Sony showed modified versions of its trailers for a slew of year-end films including "Geisha" and the musical "Rent" as well as "All the King's Men" and "Freedomland," which since have been moved off Sony's year-end schedule and will be released instead next year.

In October, the studio tried another approach, airing the first six minutes of the Oct. 26 release "The Legend of Zorro" on TBS after a broadcast of "The Mask of

Zorro." Although the sequel conjured up only \$16 million domestically in its opening weekend, the studio deemed the promotion a success.

"There isn't one TV spot on one show that does something," Ammer said. "But people want to know more. Looking at the first six minutes of a movie is very exciting; it sets the tone for the movie and gives you an opportunity to show your wares."

While movie advertising has long been prominent during primetime TV on Thursday nights — NBC's "Must-See TV" lineup had been considered a premium buy because it reached potential moviegoers just as they were likely to be making their weekend moviegoing decisions

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