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TrimSpa Prepares Post-Anna Nicole Smith Ad Campaign

Works to Achieve 'TiVo-Proof' Commercials Starring Non-Celebrities

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BATAVIA, Ohio (AdAge.com) -- TrimSpa is betting there's life after both Anna Nicole Smith and TiVo.



TrimSpa is moving quickly to reposition its brand image in the wake of Anna Nicole Smith's death.

The diet-product marketer is preparing a "TiVo-proof" TV ad to break in April as it looks to move on after the obsessively chronicled death of its high-profile spokeswoman last month.

Less-glamorous image

The ad will feature more than 400 "before" and "after" photos of less-glamorous users of TrimSpa weight-loss supplements, presented in such a way as to also show up when DVR users

fast-forward through its ads, said Tony Azzizzo, president of Goen Technologies, marketer of the brand.

Mr. Azzizzo disclosed the strategy following a presentation Feb. 28 by Information Resources Inc. and TiVo about DVR impact on ad viewership and sales. He declined last week to offer further details on the campaign or how the ad would work technically, but described it as part of TrimSpa's effort to develop a campaign following Ms. Smith's death.

Repositioning the brand

"We recently lost our most celebrated success story and spokesperson, Anna Nicole, and the company is doing its best to restage, relaunch ... reposition the brand in a new campaign," Mr. Azzizzo said. "It's not just that this commercial is cool and different. It has a lot of gravity to it because it's going to be, if not the first, one of the first new TrimSpa commercials post-Anna Nicole."

For now, the brand is still in the grieving stage. Its website last week was devoted entirely to tributes to Ms. Smith from Goen founder and CEO Alex Goen and other TrimSpa users.

But Goen's press release following Ms. Smith's death hinted at the shift in focus to less-celebrated TrimSpa users, noting "the number of success stories that are out there among its current customers."

TrimSpa sales soared 172% to \$43 million in 2004 after the brand started airing ads featuring the former Playboy centerfold the year before, according to Information Resources Inc. data reported by CNNMoney.com. But by last year, sales had shrunk to \$19.5 million. Those sales don't include Wal-Mart Stores, club stores or dollar outlets.

Dedining ad budget

TrimSpa spent \$16 million on in-house-produced ads last year, down 24.5% from 2005, according to TNS Media Intelligence.

"They had reached the point where there was a very heavy level of saturation in terms of leveraging the celebrity spokesperson, and they were probably due for a change anyway," said Robert Passikoff, founder of consultancy Brand Keys. "So looking at [the marketing] in terms of efficacy and turning it into a 'real-people' kind of thing gives them a certain amount of distance from all the negative publicity about the person who used to represent the brand."

Consumers of diet products are notoriously fickle, with yo-yo market shares and sales a way of life-as TrimSpa rivals Slim-Fast, Weight Watchers, the Atkins diet and even Dr. Phil can attest.

Slim-Fast, methadone and spray-on butter

Like other consumers, Ms. Smith had trouble remaining loyal to just one diet brand. Photos purportedly of her refrigerator obtained by entertainment site TMZ.com showed cans of Unilever's Slim-Fast alongside methadone, Worcestershire sauce and spray-on butter.

Focusing on results for ordinary users makes sense, Mr. Passikoff said, because "efficacy is the most important driver of the category." But he doubts the novelty of a made-for-DVR ad will make much difference for the brand, aside from possibly reaching some DVR viewers who would otherwise miss the spots.

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