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After Sudden Death, What Will Be the Fate of Billy Mays' Ads?

Church & Dwight Pulls Spots Featuring Pitchman, but Some Brands May Return Soon

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BOSTON (AdAge.com) -- Marketers and media outlets are finding it hard to go on without [Billy Mays](#), as reports circulated on Twitter and elsewhere on the internet of his ads still airing a day after his death. At least some brands may return to the air intentionally with Mr. Mays' ads following his funeral on Thursday.



Billy Mays

Church & Dwight Co., whose OxiClean, Kaboom, Orange Glo and Arm & Hammer brands were perhaps the biggest beneficiaries of Mr. Mays' work, said in a statement today it had pulled ads featuring the prolific pitchman.

In an e-mail statement, Church & Dwight Chief Marketing Officer Bruce Fleming said, "Our hearts go out to Billy's family. Out of respect and consideration for his loved ones, we've pulled Billy's [ads] from rotation. At this point, it's premature to talk about future plans. All of our thoughts are with the Mays family at this time."

Websites for such products as the Awesome Auger and Mighty Mendit continued to run Mr. Mays' ads on Monday, and Mr. Mays' voice greeted callers to Mighty Mendit's toll-free phone line as well. Bill McAlister, president of Media Enterprises, a Philadelphia sales and marketing firm that works with Plymouth Direct, marketer of Mighty Mendit and Mighty Putty, said the company had attempted to pull all

of Mr. Mays' ads yesterday.

"Certain media time we bought we couldn't stop," Mr. McAlister said. "But we stopped everything as of 9 this morning."

What he would have wanted

But Mr. McAlister, who counts himself as a friend of Mr. Mays for more than 14 years, said he isn't ruling out putting the ads back on the air after he's had a chance to talk with Mr. Mays' wife at the funeral. "I've known Billy for 14 years, and Billy would want this absolutely," Mr. McAlister said. "He practiced his trade. It was something he started many years ago in Atlantic City. He was proud of his trade."

A spokesman for ESPN said the network had pulled all ads featuring Mr. Mays, both for its own ESPN 360 product and all other products, after news of his death on Sunday afternoon.

But the show goes on for Discovery Channel, which had planned a marathon of episodes featuring Mr. Mays in the series "Pitchmen," culminating in an airing of the series finale July 1.

"To celebrate a man who was larger than life, the network will run tribute promos honoring Billy Mays and never-before-aired moments throughout the day," Discovery said in a statement. "A slate also will be added to the end-of-the-season finale in his remembrance." Discovery said it's also planning a special tribute show for Mr. Mays, but that no decision has been reached regarding season two of "Pitchmen."

Possible negative reaction

Referring to the ads, not the shows, Robert Passikoff, founder of the New York brand consultancy Brand Keys, said he believes consumers will react negatively to continued airings of Mr. Mays' ads after his death, be it accidentally or intentionally. "The risk is you end up with a really negative reaction," he said. Mr. Passikoff said he believes bringing Mr. Mays' ads back intentionally could also backfire. "Consumers don't react very well to disinterring celebrities," he said. "It was the vogue a while back to do that, but it was a while back because the reactions were not as good as people hoped."

Mr. Mays, who was found dead Sunday morning, most likely died of a heart attack, not a bump on the head during a rough airplane landing on Saturday, Hillsborough County Medical Examiner Vernard Adams said today.

Mr. Adams said in a televised press conference in Tampa, Fla., that preliminary results of an autopsy indicate Mr. Mays, 50, suffered from hypertensive heart disease but showed no evidence of head trauma or blood clot. Mr. Mays was taking the prescription painkillers Tramadol and hydrocodone for hip pain but had no history of drug abuse and no indication of an overdose, Mr. Adams said. He had been scheduled to undergo hip replacement surgery today.