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ADVERTISING

Celebrities Chat With Athletes, in Reebok Gear

By STUART ELLIOTT Published: November 13, 2007

REEBOK will segue next month from shoe business to show business, teaming with the IFC cable network for a celebrity interview series that is being produced by a new entertainment arm of Reebok.

Enlarge This Image



Antonella Delussu

Thierry Henry, the soccer player, will be interviewed by the actress Paz Vega in an episode of "Framed," Reebok's new series.

The series, called "Framed," is scheduled to begin Dec. 14 on IFC. Three episodes are to appear by the end of the year, with three more planned for early 2008. All six episodes are also to be made available next year on the on-demand services of various cable systems.

The other partners in "Framed" in addition to Reebok Entertainment are Carat Entertainment, a unit of the media agency Carat, part of the Aegis Group, and Roadside Entertainment, an independent production company in New York that works with, among others, ESPN, HBO and Major League Baseball.

In creating "Framed," Reebok, a unit of Adidas, joins a lengthening list of marketers that are branching into what is known as branded entertainment — programming that sells in ways meant to be more subtle than the typical interruptive TV commercial.

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The tactic, evocative of the sponsored shows that ran during the so-called golden ages of radio and television, is being embraced by brands like Axe, Jack Daniel's, Fireman's Fund, Grey Goose, Krups, Match.com, Meow Mix, Stolichnaya, Sunsilk and Toyota.

Branded entertainment is intended to make the presence of marketers "zap proof" — that is, less likely to be fast-

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forwarded through — by embedding their products and brands in the plots of shows.

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“With the whole landscape of media changing, campaigns are not the only way to reach people,” said Todd Krinsky, vice president for sports and

entertainment marketing at Reebok in Canton, Mass.

The preference is increasingly for “original content that entertains the consumer,” Mr. Krinsky added, “and is also a vehicle to communicate our brand values.”

The six episodes of “Framed,” each 30 minutes long, will feature athletes who endorse Reebok footwear and apparel, interviewed by celebrities — Reebok-related and otherwise — in fields like music and movies. The celebrities will also direct the episodes in which they appear.

For instance, the basketball player [Allen Iverson](#) will be interviewed by the singer Nelly. The actress Paz Vega will interview the soccer player Thierry Henry. And the baseball player David Ortiz will be interviewed by the comedian Carlos Mencia.

Another reason Reebok likes “Framed” is that it helps deepen the company’s relationships with its superstar endorsers, many of whom are paid millions of dollars a year to bedeck themselves in merchandise bearing the Reebok and Rbk names.

“We have a lot of great assets, athletes competing globally,” Mr. Krinsky said. “We’re trying to find a platform to tell their stories as well a vehicle to communicate what the brand’s about.”

Mr. Krinsky declined to discuss what Reebok is spending to produce “Framed” and place the series on IFC other than to say the company treated it “as we would any other important television advertising campaign from an energy and resources investment perspective.”

“Framed” will be the first series on IFC that was presented to the network by a marketer. IFC, part of the [Cablevision](#) Systems Corporation, has relationships with advertisers like Acura, [Heineken](#), Skyy vodka, Target and Yellow Tail wines, which underwrite evenings of movies and other programming.


IFC does not interrupt its shows with traditional ads, and “Framed,” too, will run without them.

“Getting away from the 30-second commercial is the future of video marketing,” said Evan Shapiro, executive vice president and general manager at IFC.

Viewers are not only “the tip of the spear” in adopting new technologies, he added, “they are the first with their fingers on the fast-forward button,” to skip through conventional commercials.

Even so, Mr. Shapiro said, in embracing branded entertainment IFC executives “did not want to do something to our audience like stick a finger in their eye.”

He recalled that “I was very skeptical” of the initial presentation from executives at Reebok Entertainment and Carat Entertainment. “I sat there with my arms crossed and



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said, 'Win me over.' ”

The executives did so, Mr. Shapiro said, by promising the series would be imbued with the same entertainment values as programs brought to IFC by Hollywood producers.

“The shows are up to our standards,” he added. “If they weren’t, we wouldn’t air them.”

Michael Yudin, managing director at Carat Entertainment in New York, agreed.

“No question about it; it’s a big challenge,” Mr. Yudin said of avoiding the overcommercialization of branded entertainment.

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When it came to signaling Reebok’s involvement, “we didn’t want to do anything overt,” he added. “We try to do it in subtle, but successful, ways.”

The most visible aspect of the Reebok participation, Mr. Yudin said, will be that the brand’s endorsers are seen clad in Reebok T-shirts, hats or shoes.

Another reason to soft-peddle plugs, he added, is a plan to have the series appear in countries where the limits on branded entertainment are stricter than in the United States.

“We didn’t want to make something that wouldn’t play over there,” Mr. Yudin said.

Carat has also worked on branded entertainment projects for networks like Logo, Oxygen and Spike TV.

Mr. Shapiro of IFC said his network would monitor the response to “Framed,” adding that if it succeeds, “we could see ourselves back next year with a big order.”

Indeed, it would be great to watch an interview with [Tiger Woods](#). Oops, he is a [Nike](#) endorser.

How about [David Beckham](#)? Alas, he wears Adidas.

[Andy Roddick](#)? Babolat shoes, the same brand as his racquets.

[Derek Jeter](#)? Sorry, also Nike.

Well, Terry Tate, the “office linebacker,” must still wear Reebok, yes?

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