

NEW MEDIA

Ford Accelerates VOD Push With Cable Firm Deals

Campaign with Cablevision, Charter, kicks off Dec. 28. **BY STEVE McCLELLAN**

FORD, BANKING THAT video-on-demand will become as vital a medium for selling cars as the Internet, this month is launching its first ad campaign utilizing the technology.

A three-month effort kicks off Dec. 28 and will air on cable systems owned by Cablevision, Woodbury, N.Y., and Charter Communications, St. Louis. The move will put the ads before roughly four to five million digital subscribers of the two cable operators, Ford officials said.

Creative for the campaign mixes branded entertainment, 30-second ads, reviews of the cars by car-shopping service Edmunds and "video tours" that highlight car features.

The Cablevision version requires viewers to click on a Ford icon, which takes them to a menu where they can access content or request more information. For Ford's Fusion, the branded entertainment includes footage of a quirky Norwegian troupe that blends rock with performance art, a creative approach clearly geared to a younger crowd, while Explorer is linked to a video of the Ironman triathlon competition, which Explorer sponsors.

Under a key provision of the deal, the cable operators will give Ford sales leads generated by viewers who request more information and give permission to be contacted. The cable systems will also provide detailed data about how VOD watchers manipulate (fast forward, pause, rewind, etc.) the ads and other content.

Neither party would disclose the media budget, but sources estimate it's in line with similar VOD deals, which range from \$50,000 to \$150,000 per month, depending on the cable operator. Ford spent more than \$1.6 billion on U.S. measured media for the first nine months of 2005, per Nielsen Monitor-Plus.

Nonetheless, Ford executives believe ad-supported VOD—still in its infancy—

will be key to selling cars in the future. "We definitely see it becoming a core medium in the whole one-to-one marketing space," said Linda Perry-Lube, car communications manager at Ford.

VOD does the Web one better with "richer video content," said Perry-Lube, which means better-looking pictures and displays of Ford products. "Internet, TV and cable are blending together, and the ability to have better interfaces with cable systems and more rich

VOD content is only going to grow."

Spearheading the campaign for Ford is Brian Bos, convergence director at JWT, Detroit. Bos joined the agency in May after a six-year stint at GM Media-works, a media-buying firm formerly dedicated to General Motors' business. While there, Bos led GM's pioneering forays into VOD and other new media platforms.

Bos said the data on how consumers interact with the medium—something Yahoo! announced last week it also will provide to marketers—is as important as the campaign itself.

"We'll be able to find the features viewers focused on, what they didn't find interesting or even if an edit has too slow a pace," said Bos. "We'll be able to adjust as we better understand what the consumer is trying to get out of the various segments."

Barry Frey, svp at Cablevision Advanced Platforms, said the response rate for consumers who requested more information about cars during a previous campaign by an unnamed client reached 3%. "That's extremely positive," he said.

Ford and GM are not the only marketers to experiment with VOD. Reebok ran a campaign on Comcast in Philadelphia in the spring featuring basketball star Allen Iverson that was Comcast's most-viewed VOD, according to the company.

Total VOD spending could reach \$2 billion by decade's end, per PricewaterhouseCoopers.



VOD coupling: Ford expects more and better data for VOD ads.