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Can brand image move upwards after *Sideways*? A strategic approach to brand placements

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Abstract In today's environment of fragmented mass media and popular technologies, such as DVR and TiVo, it is increasingly challenging for marketers to obtain quality face time with audiences. As more customers try to avoid advertisements, there has been growth in brand placement: the practice of integrating brands into entertainment media, particularly television and film. Brand placement engages the audience, limits viewers' ability to ignore commercial messages, and even impacts purchase behavior—as evidenced by the surge in Blackstone pinot noir wine sales after the brand's placement in the movie *Sideways*. Despite the prevalence of this practice, however, the industry often operates in a somewhat unfocused manner. In this article, we draw from academic literature and industry publications, offer insight regarding the growing popularity of brand placements, and suggest a specific set of guidelines to enhance the efficacy of placements in accomplishing a brand's marketing objectives.

1. What is brand placement?

> Why do they call it Ovaltine? The mug is round; the jar is round. . . .they should call it 'Roundtine.' That's gold, Jerry! Gold! ~ *Kenny Bania in* Seinfeld *(season 8, episode 6)*

Wildly popular during its first run and in subsequent syndication, the television show *Seinfeld* continues to be watched and appreciated by audiences via multi-channel reruns and DVD. Thus, it should come as no surprise that, many years after its original broadcast in 1996, fans of *Seinfeld* can still recall the Ovaltine joke featured in "The Fatigues" (season 8, episode 6). The practice of placing products and brands in media vehicles—otherwise known as product placement—dates back to 1916, when a movie was entitled *She Wanted a Ford*. Today, marketers often use the terms 'brand placement' or 'branded entertainment' to underscore the importance of the brand in this marketing activity. *Brand placement* can be defined as "the purposeful incorporation of a brand into an entertainment vehicle" (Russell & Belch, 2005, p. 74).

Brands may be integrated into shows in different ways. Typically, television programs attempt to incorporate brands in a subtle manner that fits well with the plot; consider wealthy Charlie Harper owning a Mercedes Benz (*Two and a Half Men*, CBS) or the employees of Dunder Mifflin occasionally mentioning their competitor, Staples (*The Office*, NBC).

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Some shows, though, use placements for brands in a fairly overt manner; *American Idol* judges drink from large red cups bearing the Coca-Cola logo, contestants wait in a red Coca-Cola themed room, *Idol* host Ryan Seacrest mentions AT&T in every episode when giving voting instructions, and viewers are shown music videos of contestants using Ford automobiles. Another such example is Donald Trump's *The Apprentice*, which frequently integrates brands into the show, with one entire episode devoted to teams competing to promote the launch of Crest Whitening Expressions Vanilla Mint toothpaste (Wasserman, 2005).

While placement is an old practice, it has witnessed phenomenal growth over the last decade and the industry has been estimated at $3.46 billion dollars (PQ Media, 2005). A brand appears every 3 minutes in prime-time television shows (La Ferle & Edwards, 2006) and there seems to be a general consensus that brand placement will continue to increase in usage and importance. As such, it has started attracting great interest from both practitioners and academicians (e.g., Lehu & Bressoud, 2008; Schiller, 2008). Despite the pervasiveness of brand placements, managers are shorthanded in utilizing this invaluable tool to its full potential. Further, while there are fragmented studies on the topic in the academic literature, there exists no specific set of guidelines to assist managers in getting more mileage from brand placements. Herein, we aim to address this shortcoming.

2. A growing trend

The pioneer in brand placement is considered to be the movie industry, with brands being incorporated into various scenes—typically in exchange for compensation—since the early days of cinema. More recently, prominent examples of brand placement in popular movies have included Aston Martin and BMW automobiles in the James Bond franchise; White Castle hamburgers in *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*; Huggies diapers in *Raising Arizona*; Red Stripe beer in *The Firm*; Blackstone Pinot Noir in *Sideways*; and Budget Rent-A-Truck in *Home Alone*. Along with movies, the other major outlet for brand placement is television.

While TV and films account for the dominant share of placements, the practice is also gaining popularity in other media including radio, books, music, and video games. Consequently, consumers are being bombarded with all forms of placement; from hip-hop songs mentioning Big Macs (Sutherland, 2006, p. 108), to players wearing Nike gear in video games, to Pontiac cars in Marvel comics.

The strong interest in brand placements can be linked to many factors: fragmentation of media, growth of the Internet, the demise of traditional media (newspapers), and the advent of new media (video games). Preceding the 1980s, network television was the most viable source to establish a brand. It had an omnipotent presence, and advertisements inserted into regular programming received significant exposure. In the last couple of decades, however, network television's share in the media market has been shrinking consistently, limiting marketers' access to their customers. The biggest factor in favor of brand placements may very well be the widespread consumer adoption of technologies such as TiVo and DVR. Consumers can now 'zap' (change channels) or 'zip' (fast forward) when commercials appear on-screen, making it very challenging for marketers to get face time with customers via traditional advertising. As of March 2009, 31% of American households had a DVR, up significantly from just 12% in January 2007 (Nielsenwire, 2009). Among TiVo owners, 60% record TV programs and 92% avoid advertisements when they view these recordings (Lehu, 2007, p. 35). If a brand is actually incorporated into a program, though, the drop in viewership associated with zipping and zapping is severely restricted.

For its part, brand placement in a successful movie can help the stock price of the client company to move significantly upward. This occurs because consumers connect with certain movies and map their aspirations to products depicted in these films (Wiles & Danielova, 2009). Scholarly research has shown that such placements increase brand recall by enhancing brand accessibility in consumers' minds and becoming part of an evoked brand set (Sawyer, 2006), leading to higher sales. It is not surprising, therefore, that practitioners have been quick to embrace brand placement to generate buzz around their brands. Although traditional advertising still draws billions of dollars, its share in total media expenditures has been steadily shrinking; advertising spending declined by 2.8% in 2008, a trend that is expected to continue. On the other hand, paid brand placement is expected to grow at a compounded rate of 17.6% for the next 5 years (Clifford, 2009). As brand placement continues to increase in size and importance, it becomes essential to understand the unique nature of the placement industry.

3. The brand placement industry: How it works

The brand placement industry is still evolving, and lacks the structure and objectivity associated with traditional advertising. The industry primarily consists of three major groups: clients, studios, and agencies. *Clients* are the companies that wish to place their brands in various media vehicles. *Studios*—or production companies—are the companies that make movies and television programs, and would consider including brands in the scripts of these movies or shows. The intermediaries in this industry are *agencies* that specialize in brand placement, bring clients and studios together, and charge a fee for their services (Russell & Belch, 2005). A typical scenario of how the three major players work together can be illustrated by the placement of a small beverage brand called Izze Sparkling Pomegranate juice. The client (PepsiCo) paid the agency (Spotlight Entertainment) to work with the studio (ABC) to ensure that in one scene of the popular television show, *Grey's Anatomy*, the character of Dr. Izzie Stevens was shown holding a bottle of Izze juice (Steinberg, 2009).

The industry relies heavily on existing relationships between clients/agencies and studios. In fact, agencies are frequently established by ex-employees of production companies who can use their connections to negotiate good placements for clients. Product placement is not always the result of a client's push for inclusion, though. For example, the creative team at a studio may want to include certain brands to enhance the realism of a story. Before doing so, the production team would need permission from the brand. Such permission is typically given readily, as brand managers are usually happy to receive exposure for their brands. However, when studio writers decide how they want a brand to be shown on-screen, brand managers may have little creative control. This clearly suggests an unstructured approach, which is in marked contrast to the objective measures associated with traditional advertising. Also, despite the number of players and the money spent in the brand placement industry, there is still a lot of uncertainty about what really works. As articulated by a placement agency executive: "It's an industry where everyone thinks that they're an expert until you talk to them and you realize they have no idea what's going on" (Russell & Belch, 2005, p. 73).

4. The need for better results

Brand placement is quite unique in nature because it incorporates elements of advertising in the context of entertainment; as such, it is sometimes referred to as 'hybrid advertising' (Russell & Belch, 2005). Despite the surge of interest in brand placement, though, a number of questions remain unanswered. Practitioners are often happy with simply getting their brand placed in an entertainment vehicle, sans specific objectives (Balasubramanian, Karrh, & Patwardhan, 2006), and that is not good enough. As Jack Trout, of Trout & Partners, articulates: "The problem with product placements is that you miss a lot of them. It's like wallpaper; it just sort of fades into the background" (Wasserman, 2005, p. 22). On the flip side, there is also the chance that instead of generating positive consumer attitudes, blatant and repeated placements in a program may cause consumer backlash against a brand.

Another problem lies in the fact that—unlike traditional advertising—the brand placement industry has not utilized the metrics of reach, frequency, and GRPs to gauge effectiveness. Meaningfully assessing the success of brand placements in a media vehicle is possible only if good performance metrics are used in this domain. This has not really happened, primarily because scholars and practitioners have been slow to consider brand placement "a promotional practice whose outcomes should be evaluated systematically" (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998, p. 15).

By and large, academic research has focused on narrower aspects of brand placement such as audience connectedness in television programs, audio vs. visual placements, the role of congruence in placements (e.g., Balasubramanian et al., 2006; Hudson & Hudson, 2006; Russell & Stern, 2006), and the role of placements on recall and attitudes (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Lehu & Bressoud, 2008). Despite research in this domain, however, there exists no clearly specified set of guidelines for managers planning brand placements. This explains why, for every high profile placement success story, there are numerous others that have fizzled out and are never accounted for; and, little evidence regarding how specific placements have paid off. Therefore, scholarly work in this domain can be used to guide managers to make better decisions. With this objective in mind, we build upon the academic literature in the brand placement domain, as well as examples from the popular press and business magazines, to develop a systematic approach to brand placements.

Despite the growing popularity of new media platforms and devices—such as video iPods, cell phones, and streaming video—the average American watched more than 151 hours of television per month during the fourth quarter of 2008, making it the dominant media outlet. Movies are another very popular vehicle. Today's consumers, pressed for time, are simply taking their TV programs and movies to other media, where they can watch at their own convenience and avoid the segments they wish to skip (Poulin, 2009). As such, 90% of paid brand placements occur in film and television (PQ Media, 2007), and they are the focus of our article.

5. Deconstructing brand placement: What do we know?

In an advertising context, the effectiveness of brand placement should be measured on three dimensions: reach, impact, and frequency. *Reach* refers to the number of people who are exposed to the brand, and is therefore a function of the size of the movie or television program audience. Logically, blockbuster movies and popular television shows have a wider reach; for example, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* was viewed by millions of people and generated close to 400 million dollars worldwide (Reuters, 2009). Popular TV programs can also reach very large audiences; for instance, the 2009 season opener of *American Idol* was watched by an estimated 30.1 million viewers (TVWeek, 2009). Smaller movies and/or television programs have a far more limited audience but may represent viable options for a lower price, which may be particularly suitable for niche brands.

Impact refers to the extent to which an ad makes the desired impression on an audience; therefore, it is a function of how well the brand is integrated into the programming and the context in which the brand is being displayed. In a typical prime-time television show, most brands are placed on screen for less than 5 seconds and are either visible or are mentioned in the script (La Ferle & Edwards, 2006). The presence of a product or brand in a movie or show could result in favorable outcomes because mere exposure to a brand enhances its accessibility (Cowley & Barron, 2008). However, by limiting themselves to simply placing their brand in a movie, managers may be shortchanging themselves by failing to adequately leverage the extensive benefits of brand placement.

Finally, *frequency* is defined as how often the brand is featured in an entertainment vehicle. This may prove more challenging in a cinematic context, and easier to achieve via continued routine placement within a television series (Kinney & Sapolsky, n.d.).

Brand placement affects brand awareness (Dahlén, Friberg, & Nilsson, 2009). In a European study of more than 3,000 video viewers, 34% could recall one or more brands placed in a movie a day after watching the movie on DVD (Lehu & Bressoud, 2008). Exposure to the brand leads to higher recall because of 'priming.' Specifically, if consumers are primed through another stimulus—such as brand placement in a movie or a television show—they are more likely to later remember an ad for the brand. This makes it a valuable strategic tool that can enhance *brand equity*: the differential effect that consumer brand knowledge, which consists of "brand awareness and brand image," has on the customer's response to marketing activity (Keller, 1999, p. 102).

It is important to note that not every brand is equally suited for placement in all contexts. If a brand cannot be incorporated meaningfully into the story or plot line, placement may actually prove counterproductive. Referred to as 'blatancy,' Wiles and Danielova (2009) found that when a placement seems to be forced, it negatively affects a firm's stock price. On the other hand, 'modality'—the visual presence of a brand, accompanied by a verbal mention—has a positive impact. Thus, a strong presence in a justifiable context is most effective because the audience buys into the idea of the placement, and has a stronger association with the brand. This, in turn, leads to a more favorable image and a higher preference for the brand.

One concern is that, as many marketers turn to brand placements to reach their audiences, viewers may see or hear incongruent placements: brands not really connected to the plot being placed in the scene. Such placements can impact recall and attitude, but marketers have to be careful. While incongruent placements can enhance recall for visual placements, the impact of incongruent visual placements on consumer attitudes is negative. This is because consumers note the incongruent nature of the placement, start thinking about it, and generate counterarguments (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Congruent placements, on the other hand, increase persuasion (Russell, 2002). An example of congruent placement can be gleaned from the 1982 movie, *ET: The Extra Terrestrial*. In the film, Elliott successfully attempts to make friends with the alien by offering him Reese's Pieces; following this brand placement, Hershey reported a 65% increase in the sales of Reese's candy (Kinney & Sapolsky, n.d.).

Studies have also shown that certain types of movies and television programs may be more suited for brand placements. For example, the positive mood generated by sitcoms has a spillover effect on the brands placed in them (Balasubramanian et al., 2006). Too, shows such as *Friends* have very engaged audiences, resulting in substantial 'meaning transfer' from the characters to the brands (McCracken, 1989, p. 310; Russell, 2002). The meaning-transfer model is frequently used to explain celebrity endorsements and, by extension, brand placements. This model suggests that when celebrities use a product or when brands are placed in an entertainment vehicle, "rich symbolic meaning can be transferred to the placed product" (Wiles &

Danielova, 2009, p. 45). Thus, when Joey drinks a Coke in *Friends* and Carrie Bradshaw wears Manolo Blahnik shoes in *Sex and the City*, viewers link these characters, situations, and brands together to draw inferences about the brands.

When the viewer is exposed to a brand in a particular context, it will influence memory about the brand's message by adding or reinforcing links in the associative memory network (Cornwell, Humphreys, Maguire, Weeks, & Tellegen, 2006). Thus, the context and nature of the brand placement may create brand associations that shape the brand's image. For instance, Ray Ban Wayfarers became hip when Tom Cruise wore them in *Risky Business* (Lehu, 2007), while Mini Cooper benefitted from its placement in *The Italian Job* (Wiles & Danielova, 2009).

Positive brand associations, in turn, can change consumer response by influencing liking and purchase behavior. A classic example of this is the aforementioned boost of Reese's Pieces sales from placement in *ET*. Similarly, when television character Ally McBeal wore Nick & Nora pajamas, the brand witnessed a 35% increase in sales over a 3-year period (Russell & Stern, 2006). Thus, there is evidence to show that greater recall, increased liking, and higher sales are possible via brand placements, although practitioners are not typically clear on how to achieve these outcomes on a consistent basis. It is also important to note that these outcomes can be diluted if the context or environment is cluttered. When that happens, only strong, familiar brands will be noticed and remembered by customers (Tellis, 1988; Wiles & Danielova, 2009). This implies that if a movie or television show features a large number of brand placements, a relatively unfamiliar brand would be better off not being associated with it.

Since TV programs and movies are typically one-time exposure events for most viewers, it is difficult for brand placements to make an impact on the audience if the brands are not already well known. This limited frequency inherent to placements also explains why unique or distinctive brands are more likely to be remembered than other brands (Karrh, 1998). It makes placement particularly appropriate for, say, Apple, which is a strong brand but which has an advertising budget significantly lower than its key competitors such as HP, Dell, and Microsoft.

There are three broad categories of placements: visual, verbal, and plot connectedness. The *visual* aspect is the on-screen presence of the brand; the *verbal* aspect refers to mentioning the brand in the dialogue; and *plot connectedness* is the integration of the brand into the plot. Overall recall is greater for verbal, as compared to visual, placements. Thus, Rachel mentioning Pottery Barn to Monica in *Friends* is more likely to increase recall for the brand than a simple visual of a Pottery Barn store (Russell, 2002).

Nonetheless, content analysis of prime-time programming on four major television networks—ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX—revealed that most brand placements were visual in nature (52.8%), followed by verbal placements (32.5%). Only 14.7% of brand placements had both visual and verbal components. Most of these placements appear to be subtle in nature. In 77% of visual placements, the characters had no interaction with the product, and the brand was not shown in a close-up almost 80% of the time (La Ferle & Edwards, 2006). While visual presence may boost a brand's recall, further increase in recall or enhancement of its image is lacking in the absence of verbal integration and plot connectedness. This suggests a suboptimal utilization of brand placements.

The next area that should be addressed is the valence of the depiction. Oftentimes, placements are structured via television or movie characters using these brands. There is evidence to show that consumers align their attitudes toward brands based on the valence (positive or negative) and strength (weak or strong) of the in-program character-brand link, as well as the valence and strength of their own affinity toward the character. Specifically, when characters' attitudes are positive, they influence viewer attitudes positively. However, when characters' attitudes are negative, they "influence viewer attitudes only if they are strongly associated with the product" (Russell & Stern, 2006, p. 15). As such, the context in which the brand is depicted has to be consistent with the brand's image. Valence can also be neutral and effective. With fun impulse purchase products, humor works well—even if the context is quirky or unconventional. For example, in a *Seinfeld* episode, Kramer extols the virtues of Junior Mints and tries to force Jerry to eat them. Junior Mints was happy with the brand placement because of the positive associations and humor, and approved the product's placement despite the final scene involving candy literally falling into a patient during surgery (Buss, 1998).

6. Where do we go from here? Adopting a strategic approach to brand placement

From the literature discussed thus far, it is evident that many factors influence the success of brand placements. These include—among others—the appropriateness of the brand for placement, the fit of the placement with the media vehicle, and the congruence of the placement. In this section, we propose guidelines that incorporate these insights such that managers can make more effective brand placement decisions.

6.1. Work with brand placement agents

Clients must have some measure of control over the placement process if they wish to ensure that the goals for their brands are met. Toward this end they are better off working with agencies, which usually have experience interacting with studios and streamlining the process. For their part, the larger studios are often willing placement partners, given that production costs can run very high and contributions from clients can go a long way toward meeting these expenses. Consider, for example, the James Bond movie *Die Another Day*; it is estimated the film reaped over $120 million from various brand placements (Lehu, 2007). Studios may also prefer to work with agencies, rather than directly with clients, due to existing relationships which facilitate 'one-stop' service.

While clients may be located anywhere, major studios and brand placement agencies are concentrated in the Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago regions. This is intended to foster face-to-face interactions and ensure shorter response times, the latter being particularly critical to studios in an industry where production moves at a fast clip with tight deadlines. Moreover, an agency's existing relationships can help get a brand placed in the most favorable light. It is often difficult for clients without strong ties to the industry to accomplish the same on their own. While the guidelines we recommend are useful, brand managers need to appreciate this reality, and try to seek an agency's assistance.

A lone client's input regarding the placement process could range wildly, from nil to substantial. This underscores the need for agencies that are more adept at negotiating contracts to ensure, for example, the brand is compatible with the storyline and is not drowned in clutter. Agencies also serve as a watchdog for their clients' brands to ensure they are not depicted in negative and violent scenes. Finally, agencies can provide proprietary outcome measures for the placements they arrange. As such, clients should choose agencies on the basis of the success of their track record, the nature and strength of their relationship with studios, and the outcome measures they provide.

Apple computers are frequently placed in Hollywood movies. The aforementioned Izze juice was placed in *Grey's Anatomy* because of the agency's relationships with the ABC prop masters (Steinberg, 2009). And it was due to a placement agency's strong ties with the studio that, in the movie *Raising Arizona*, Huggies brand diapers were mentioned verbally, the packaging was visible on-screen for 36 seconds, and the product was at the center of a memorably humorous scene—resulting in a very favorable outcome for the brand (Sawyer, 2006).

6.2. Set clear brand placement goals

As brand placement gains importance, it is also becoming an expensive exercise with sizeable financial investment. Many executives opt for brand placement because they see it as a lower-cost option compared to traditional advertising, rather than as a strategic communication tool with specific communication goals. In situations like this, placements may be implemented without much thought being put into the process. One client admitted: "A lot of times it's placements that we didn't really choose. . .We get a lot of product placement just by accident" (Russell & Belch, 2005, p. 82).

The problem with such an approach is that, once the placement is implemented, there is no way of knowing how well it is working—or whether it is working at all. As such, brand managers should have clear objectives for each placement agreement. These objectives can cover a wide spectrum, depending on the existing status of the brand: from creating awareness, enhancing knowledge or interest, and maintaining loyalty, to hopefully increasing sales and revenue.

Practitioners and scholars both agree, however, that brand placement works best as part of an integrated communications approach (Karrh, McKee, & Pardun, 2003). The theoretical explanation for this lies in the role of priming in enhancing memory, which we discussed previously. When brand placement is executed as part of an integrated campaign, brand placements can prime ads for the brand, and vice versa. For example, when Crest's new Vanilla Mint toothpaste was placed in *The Apprentice*, the goal was to increase awareness and generate trial. Thus, the placement effort was complemented by ads, a contest for viewers, and communication on the Crest website; this resulted in 800,000 website hits and over 40,000 requests for samples in less than 2 hours (Lehu, 2007). Managers should strive to specify clear goals in such a manner for all brand placement efforts, in conjunction with the overall communication efforts and activities for the brand.

We mentioned that reach, impact, and frequency can be used to measure the goals of a placement exercise. In terms of frequency, brand placements are inherently single-exposure events; most consumers are exposed to a specific placement only once, unless they choose to view a movie or a show multiple times. This limits the efficacy of a brand placement to certain objectives. It is more suited to maintaining a brand's top-of-mind awareness and its position in the consumer's evoked set, but is less effective in creating brand preference unless the brand is integrated extensively into the show. This further underscores the importance of considering placements as part of an integrated communication effort for most brands.

6.3. Choose the desired reach and impact of brand placement

We now focus on brand placement's reach and impact. Table 1 suggests brand placement options as a function of placement goals. When the objective is to simply enhance awareness or top-of-mind recall, visual placements may work well enough. Thus, Coca-Cola's obvious and prominent placement in *American Idol* is effective because the audience doesn't need to be educated about the Coca-Cola brand. On the other hand, when the appeal of a brand needs to be emphasized, it is important that the product receive verbal placement at the very least, or—more optimally—complete integration into the plot. This is in contrast to the current practice that has predominantly focused on visual placements.

Similarly, movies and television shows of wider reach may be better suited for products with mass market appeal, whereas products with a focused appeal may be better served by niche programs and films. For example, while General Motors had success with placement of its Chevy Camaro in *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, given Camaro's appeal to a much narrower audience the brand may have benefitted more from placement in *Fast and Furious 4*, the plotline of which revolved around the power, speed, and agility of street cars. Brand managers should be resigned to the fact that box office or Nielsen ratings success cannot be predicted with a high level of accuracy; however, the systematic approach outlined here is nonetheless meaningful.

6.4. Assess fit with media vehicle

Brand managers should choose media vehicles that are appropriate for the brand and that match the profile of the target audience. Vehicles which induce positive moods, such as sitcoms, and those which have a high degree of audience connectedness (Karrh et al., 2003; Russell, Norman, & Heckler, 2004) are particularly effective. Viewers of shows with high audience connectedness—including *Friends*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Sex and the City*, and *Hannah Montana*—are very involved with the on-screen characters, the lives they live, and the products they use. The viewers often live vicariously through the characters in these shows, setting the stage for seamless and tremendous meaning transfer; they are more likely to adopt brands used by these characters. Audience connectedness for shows watched by the target audience can be evaluated through qualitative research or by using quantitative scales, such as the audience connectedness scale (Russell et al., 2004).

Media vehicle fit needs to be assessed carefully. Sitcoms are more suited to fun, impulse purchase brands because of their positive valence and the upbeat mood they create. Similarly, serious brands trying to gain the trust of the audience may be placed in news programming, and performance products may be placed in appropriate sporting events. For instance, placement of Tide detergent in NASCAR races as a result of team sponsorship will be less effective compared to Valvoline's placement in the same events. Once television shows and movies are shortlisted for consideration, preference should be given to those that have the right amount of engagement for the brand.

6.5. Seek congruence of placement with the plot

Congruence between brand placement and plot is imperative, as it has been shown that congruent placements can significantly increase persuasion

Table 1. Specifying reach and impact of brand placements

REACH / IMPACT	Narrow reach	Wide reach
Low impact (enhancing awareness and recall)	Visual placement in niche TV programs and small budget movies	Visual placement in high budget movies and popular TV programs
High impact (image enhancement/ preference building)	Verbal placement and integration in plot in niche TV programs and small budget movies	Verbal placement and integration in plot in high budget movies and popular TV programs

and sales. For example, in the movie *The Firm*, Gene Hackman asks Tom Cruise to "grab a Red Stripe" from the refrigerator in a scene set in the Cayman Islands. One month after the movie's release, sales of the Jamaican Red Stripe beer shot up by over 50% (Buss, 1998). Similarly, in the movie *Sideways*, two friends—Miles and Jack—take a road trip to California wine country. Miles, a wine connoisseur, speaks glowingly of pinot noir. In the 2 months following *Sideways*' release, sales of Blackstone pinot noir wine (featured in the movie) increased by 150%, while overall pinot noir sales in the United States went up by 22% (Lehu, 2007).

Incongruent placements, or those which don't fit naturally into the plot, are also capable of enhancing recall; however, they may generate unwelcome negative attitudes. As such, if the primary objective is simply to increase recall, an incongruent visual placement may have the desired effect. But, in most cases, incongruent placements should be avoided.

Even when brand placements are congruent, the presence of too many other brands in the vehicle can limit efficacy. Some movies and television programs are extremely cluttered with placements, which may distract the audience from the message of the brand. These are better avoided entirely. A case in point is the James Bond movie *Tomorrow Never Dies*, which faced backlash due to a seemingly endless stream of brand placements (Buss, 1998). Importantly, such blatancy of placements can not only negatively affect a media vehicle, but also the brands featured.

Finally, when executing brand placements, it is important to keep in mind that movies and television shows could have a very long life via syndication and DVD (Lehu & Bressoud, 2008). Thus, it is worthwhile to assess whether the communicated message will be appropriate some years down the line, and it is advisable to opt for brand placements that tie in well with the brand's long-term positioning.

6.6. Monitor performance

Managers need to demonstrate the value of marketing investments in brand placements. Historically, however, a lack of specialized services has made this task difficult. Fortunately, this has begun to change with new tools available to help managers in the placement process. For example, iTVX offers a solution called TEAM (Total Entertainment Accountability and Measurement) that calculates the monetary value of brand integration by taking into account "both the media valuation and the marketing impact" (Wasserman, 2005, p. 22). Other agencies, including Nielsen Media, provide tools such as Place Value for evaluating brand placements. Nielsen also has a team of employees that logs the details of verbal and visual brand placements in television shows that are then matched to the shows' viewership at that point in time (Wasserman, 2005). But, much more is needed on this front.

It is crucial to determine if brand placement goals are met. To this end, actual frequency, reach, and impact must be assessed carefully. In terms of movies and television shows, placements get a single exposure for most of the audience. Overall reach is relatively easy to measure. Syndicated research services like Nielsen provide ratings for TV shows. Box office revenues are a good estimate of the total audience for movies, but these figures must be supplemented by data regarding DVD sales that follow. However, unlike the many options for tracking TV audiences, there is no syndicated service that measures audience profile for movies. Thus, clients or their agencies may want to accomplish this via their own studies. Impact can be measured through primary research, utilizing benchmarks like recall, brand preference, and purchase intent. The most effective way to accomplish this may be exit interviews with movie audiences (which can also be used to assess audience profile) and the use of a viewer panel for television programs. Audiences can be asked a variety of questions, including unaided and aided recall for the brand, their preference for the brand, and if the placement influenced their intent to purchase the product.

Finally, clients can obtain additional outcome measures from annual reports agencies prepare for them. These typically include, but are not limited to: number, length, and level of integration into the plot (e.g., visual only, verbal) for all placements. This information can be used as building blocks for any model to assign a monetary value to the placement exercise. An examination of costs associated with each can also help evaluate the various options by comparing returns on investment, giving placement a well-deserved position in a marketer's arsenal.

7. Wrapping up

By and large, consumers have accepted brand placements. Given the explosion in media choices and branded entertainment, brand placement is slated to grow exponentially as advertising agencies, production companies, brand management teams, and media managers embrace this practice. The guidelines we have proposed in this article should be helpful to managers in getting more mileage from this invaluable marketing tool.

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