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Cablevision Touts New Advanced Ad Product “Optimum Select” used by Gillette, Unilever

By Glen Dickson

Cable operator Cablevision says it launched a new advanced advertising system earlier this month that allows subscribers to request information about products and receive samples and coupons through the mail with a click of their remote.

The new "Optimum Select" is a request-for-information (RFI) system that runs off traditional 30-second spots within some 25 linear channels. A graphic overlay, generated by the subscriber's set-top box, appears at the bottom of the commercial asking if the viewer would like more information. With a click of the "Select" button on the remote, the screen undergoes a graphic effect known as a "squeezeback"---also generated by the set-top box---that places the live video in a small window in the upper right corner of the screen and places additional graphics and images, such as a picture of a product sample, on the left.

The viewer is asked if they would like to receive a relevant sample or coupon, and with a second click of the remote, that request is then sent upstream to Cablevision's back-office systems. So far, the operator has been using outside fulfillment houses to handle the subscriber requests, such as mailing a sample.

The first advertiser to use Optimum Select was Gillette, which ran a commercial for a 2-in-2 face wash/body wash. Cablevision was given 30,000 samples of the product to distribute to customers, and ran out of the samples in just over a week, according to David Kline, president of Cablevision and Rainbow Media's ad unit, Rainbow Advertising Sales Corporation. Kline says that Cablevision is getting a "significant premium" for local commercials with such interactive capability, but wouldn't discuss details.

"They could get thousands of leads off one commercial," says Kline. "That's incredibly valuable to advertisers."

Other advertisers who have committed to use the Optimum Select service include Benjamin Moore, which is giving away coupons for a free paint sample; retailer Century 21, which is offering a \$10 gift card to interested viewers; and Unilever, which is giving away samples of Degree Fine Fragrance Body Mist.

Cablevision plans to eventually be able to send coupons and promotional information to subscribers via email, but so far is sticking to mailing items to physical addresses because its subscriber database is more accurate (99%) in that regard, says Kline.

Kline and Barry Frey, executive VP of advanced platforms for Cablevision, are demonstrating Optimum Select and several other forms of advanced advertising, including video-on-demand telescoping, dynamic VOD insertion and addressable ads, to some 85 top media buyers this week in a suite at Madison Square Garden. Cablevision has already had some of the technologies, such as telescoping off a 30-second spot into a branded VOD channel, for several months, and Frey and Kline say the early viewer response has been strong. For example, several hundred thousand of Cablevision's total three million subscribers have already used the telescoping feature.

"We think the 30-second unit is going to have a renaissance with this," says Kline.