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Cablevision Rolls Out Optimum Select

By Anthony Crupi

Cablevision on Tuesday took the wraps off Optimum Select, a new advanced-advertising service that includes a call-to-action application.

Among the first clutch of clients to sign on as Optimum Select partners are: Unilever, Gillette, New York-based retailer Century 21 and Benjamin Moore.

First announced last month, Optimum Select went live in early October, with an opt-in execution for Gillette's line of body wash. Cablevision subscribers who clicked on an on-screen overlay were issued free samples of Gillette's shower-gel product.

Gillette provided 30,000 samples for the promotion. The stockpile was depleted in a week.

In a second initiative, paint brand Benjamin Moore sent a coupon for a free two-ounce color sample to Cablevision subs who depressed the "select" button on their remote during the spot. Similar premiums are available to viewers who interact with ads for Century 21 and Degree Fine Fragrance Body Mist, a Unilever brand.

"Unilever has been enhancing our television ad spend with interactivity whenever possible, and it's a proven element in our overall marketing mix," said Rob Master, director of media North America for Unilever. "We applaud all new developments that add further scale and consumer involvement to the existing iTV footprint."

In addition to the RFI wrinkle, Cablevision also allows for telescoping long-form content from standard 30-second spots, which presents an opportunity for marketers to more fully immerse viewers in their brand messaging. Automotive clients are particularly well suited for telescoping ads.

Cablevision is also tinkering with addressable ad units and for the last few years has offered dedicated advertising channels like the VOD showcase Disney Channel on Demand.

"We're extremely pleased by the initial response," said David Kline, president of Rainbow Advertising Sales Corporation. "Advertisers recognize the extended brand experience enabled by Optimum Select, where direct marketing meets TV and transforms the traditional ad model to offer qualified lead generation, brand engagement, enhanced measurement, insight and learning."

While Cablevision didn't disclose how it was pricing its Optimum Select units, the operator said advertisers will pay a premium for the interactive spots. For the first stage of the deployment, the interactive ads have been activated on 25 major cable networks.

Local ad sales account for a tiny fraction of Cablevision's overall revenue haul. In the second quarter of 2009, the MSO took in \$26 million in ad sales, down 13 percent from the year-ago period (\$31 million). That works out to 1.4 percent of the company's total Q2 revenue of \$1.88 billion.

Cablevision will begin pitching Optimum Select to media buyers later this week.