

## MEDIA

## ADVERTISING

# CNN Turns to Event Marketing to Strut Its Brand

By STUART ELLIOTT

CNN is seeking to bring its brand to life beyond the TV, PC and cellphone screens by forming a division devoted to event marketing.

The new CNN Events division, under the auspices of the advertising sales department, will put on panels, conferences and meetings on newsmaking and newsworthy subjects. Although the events will not be televised on CNN, the network's reporters and anchors will serve as speakers and moderators.

The events will be sponsored by CNN advertisers, who will be acknowledged on invitations and at the conferences. But CNN executives say sponsors will have no control over the content of the events.

The initial effort of CNN Events, called the CNN Inspire Summit, is Tuesday at the Time Warner Center. The event, sponsored by the L'Oréal Paris brand sold by the American unit of L'Oréal, will salute women for achievements in fields like politics, medicine and philanthropy.

At the event, L'Oréal Paris plans to announce the first recipients of an honor the company is sponsoring: the Women of Worth Awards.

A second CNN event, planned for next month, will focus on small business and will be sponsored by United Parcel Service. Awards will also be presented, as part of a United Parcel campaign that carries the theme "Out of the box."

The start-up of CNN Events is indicative of the growing popularity of experiential marketing, giving brands tangible form to help them forge closer, more emotional ties with consumers.

"Consumption of media is changing as we speak," said Greg D'Alba, chief operating officer at the advertising sales and marketing unit of CNN in New York, part of the Turner Broadcasting System division of Time Warner.

"Digital media, over the past year, has extended the relevancy of our television brand," Mr. D'Alba said, referring to initiatives like podcasts and video-on-demand. "Event marketing is giving us an



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opportunity to extend the breadth of the brand."

Marketers have sponsored newscasts since the early days of radio and television. Some consumers still recall when "NBC Nightly News" was known as the "Camel News Caravan," or when the Gulf Oil logo appeared on the desks of news anchors covering space shots and political conventions.

Today, "The News Hour With Jim Lehrer" on PBS receives financing from Archer Daniels Midland, an agricultural conglomerate, and radio newscasters like Paul Harvey and Charles Osgood continue to read commercials. Also, many news organizations, including The New York Times, have marketing divisions that offer events sponsored by advertisers.

Nevertheless, the practice of inviting marketers to take part — for a price — in events produced by the news media raises some eyebrows.

"It's a slippery slope," said Todd Gitlin, a professor at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University. "Think about how much that goes on in public life, and that

includes on campuses, has been privatized. It raises legitimate questions about who's calling which tune."

Mr. Gitlin added, however, that many of the people attending events sponsored by marketers are sophisticated enough to be "making allowances" for the sponsorships.

Even so, they may wonder if they "are getting the 'lite' version" of a contentious or provocative subject, he added, or if the advertisers influence who appears on a panel or the topic the panelists discuss.

Mr. D'Alba said CNN was taking steps to make sure that did not happen: "Like any program, like any platform, we decide what an event may be and then it's open to advertisers. It's how we've always conducted our business."

Carol Hamilton, president and general manager for the L'Oréal Paris division of L'Oréal USA in New York, said the event her company was sponsoring "is not commercial at all" and its participation is "contextually appropriate."

The CNN Inspire Summit is to begin with remarks by Paula Zahn,

a CNN anchor, and be moderated by Zain Verjee, a CNN correspondent. The participants are to include Susan Dell, chairwoman of the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation; Eve Ensler, the author and playwright; and Jeannette Kagame, the wife of the president of Rwanda.

The U.P.S. panel, to be at the Time Warner Center on Nov. 9, will be called "On the Rise," after a weekly segment on small business on the CNN network that the company also sponsors. It is to be moderated by Ali Velshi, a CNN business anchor, and will be devoted to subjects like employee health care and expanding overseas.

"The event allows us to extend our communications into the experiential realm and interact with some of our small-business customers," said Larry Bloomenkranz, vice president for brand management, advertising and sponsorships at U.P.S.

U.P.S. took part in what Mr. Bloomenkranz called a test of the CNN events, sponsoring a similar panel in New York last October, which, he said, "went really well."

Asked what would happen if a panelist at the event next month recommended that small-business owners use FedEx or the Postal Service, Mr. Bloomenkranz laughed, then likened the sponsorship to that of news programs on CNN.

"Obviously, we can't control the news content on television, or the content of events," he said, but "you weigh all that" against the benefits of sponsorship, which include "the capabilities, the resources, the credibility, that CNN brings to the party."

"This says the event is bringing real knowledge about small business to our customers," he added, "and it's not some U.P.S.-controlled shill event."

Asked about cost, Mr. D'Alba said he "could not put a price tag" on the sponsorships because they were sold as part of packages that marketers like L'Oréal and United Parcel are buying across CNN, including television, the Internet, news provided through cellphones and podcasts.