

Disney's promotion to hit 'Home'

Studio outlines 'Home Improvement' marketing plans for stations

By David Tobenkin

Disney will launch blockbuster off-net sitcom *Home Improvement* Sept. 11, aided by a two-pronged \$90 million promotional push to brand the strip's location and time on stations and peak audience interest in a previously unaired episode that will launch the strip, syndicator Disney last week told a gathering of stations that bought the show.

The company also confirmed that it is considering a joint promotion with the other debuting heavy hitter, *Seinfeld*.

"The watchword of the day is big; we have many ideas and creative concepts to share," Sal Sardo told a crowd of 186 affiliates' marketing and promotion executives at a Laguna Niguel, Calif., conference. Sardo, Buena Vista Television vice president of advertising and creative media, said that since the show already has enormous general awareness, the battle to inform viewers that it is a strip likely airing on another station is one best waged at the local level using locally tailored promotional campaigns.

The advertising salvo for the show and the first episode will begin a



Buena Vista TV's Sal Sardo outlines promotional strategy for 'Home Improvement' to an attentive audience of over 180 station executives.

month before its launch, with a shift to heavy promotion of the episode a week before its debut. Much of the national campaign for the show is being hammered out in conjunction with a 10-affiliate advisory board working with BVT.

For the first episode's promotion, print ads will feature tag lines includ-

ing "*Home Improvement* Brings Out the Big Guns" and "The Ultimate Race Against Tim." Radio spots will feature a military-sounding voice ordering viewers to watch the show.

As for the overall campaign, Sardo says no single tag line will dominate, while adding that "Six Tims a Week," a reference to the strip's six weekly episodes and lead character Tim Taylor (Tim Allen), is his favorite.



Sardo is exploring the possibility of joint promotions featuring the cast of *Home Improvement* and the other major off-network launch, Columbia TriStar Television Distribution's *Seinfeld*. CTTD officials already have said they are receptive to the idea (BROADCASTING & CABLE, April 3).

The *Home Improvement* campaign will feature a "New Year's Eve in Summer" element with a lighted hammer, instead of a ball, being lowered from New York's Times Square during the launch of the initial episode on Sept. 11.

Disney Vice President of Research Joanne Burns told station attendees that the show's strength among men, women and youth suggests they would do well to promote it with other shows attracting diverse audiences, such as Twentieth Television's off-network strip of *The Simpsons* or older-skewing kids shows like Fox Children's Network's *Batman*.

In response to an affiliate's question about how well the show plays to minority audiences, Burns conceded that the show is not one of the highest-rated shows among African-American viewers, but said its minority rat-

Burrows cheers venture with NBC

NBC is teaming with director/producer James Burrows to form a production company. Burrows will be responsible for the creative activities and oversight of the operation.

Under the terms of the agreement, projects may be developed and produced with third parties, adding financing and distribution possibilities. Burrows also can be involved in projects not associated with the co-owned company.

"The formation of this new company with NBC adds an exciting dimension to my professional life," Burrows says. "It not only allows me to do what I enjoy most, which is to be in the mainstream of the creative process, but gives me an opportunity to have a significant participation in the enhanced values created through the properties we produce."

The first project of the untitled venture is *Caroline of the City*, which is being produced in association with CBS Productions. The series has been scheduled for NBC's Thursday night lineup at 9:30-10.

A veteran of shows including *Taxi* and *Night Court*, Burrows also directed more than 250 episodes of *Cheers* and was executive producer of that series.

—SC