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TEQUILA BRAND PLACED IN BROADWAY'S 'SWEET CHARITY'

Neil Simon OKs Script Change to Hype Product

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By [Lisa Sanders](#)

NEW YORK (Adage.com) -- As part of a product placement campaign in Broadway's *Sweet Charity*, playwright Neil Simon approved a script change to promote Gran Centenario tequila, according to the deal makers.



Jose Cuervo's tequila has been woven into the script, the stage sets and the advertising and promotion for 'Sweet Charity.'

The arrangement was the latest brand integration success by Amy Willstatter, president of New York-based Bridge to Hollywood/Broadway, who specializes in inserting product promotions in and around live theater productions.

Last fall, spirits marketer Jose Cuervo was looking for a unique way to generate buzz in the U.S. for its little-known premium tequila Gran Centenario, but the company only had a modest budget to work with.

Anatomy of a deal

Executives at Jose Cuervo's advertising agency, Omnicom Group's Arnell Group of New York, introduced Carlos Arana, Jose Cuervo's managing director, and Onute Miller, Gran Centenario's brand director, to Ms. Willstatter. She brokers agreements between various marketers and Broadway productions and works on retainer with Spotco, a New York agency focused on theatre advertising (clients include *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *Avenue Q* and *Sweet Charity*). After hearing about Gran Centenario's goals, she reviewed Spotco clients and came up with *Sweet Charity*, the Neil Simon revival about a hard-luck dancehall hostess searching for a good man, as the show that best met the tequila's brand attributes. The show opened in April.

"The play is a fun environment," Ms. Willstatter said. What's more, with a new-to-Broadway leading lady, Christina Applegate, best-known for her long-running role on TV's *Married with Children*, *Sweet Charity* potentially brings to Broadway a new generation of theatergoers -- just the sort of upscale, experience-oriented consumers Gran Centenario was looking for.

Other theater projects

Ms. Willstatter previously signed Pfizer Women's Health, Procter & Gamble Co.'s Olay Regenerist and Anheuser-Busch's Michelob Ultra to sponsor the Broadway and national tour productions of *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. She also made British Airways the official airline of the National Theater in New York and arranged for Hennessy to be the opening night sponsor of *Raisin in*

the Sun at the Royale Theater.

Marketing competition in the tequila category is increasing as its reputation has evolved from a drink often associated with frat-house bashes to one that's increasingly common at more sophisticated affairs. U.S. sales of high-end and super-premium cases rose 29% to 1.2 million cases in 2004 over the prior year, said David Ozgo, chief economist of the Distilled Spirits Council of the U.S.

With Ms. Willstatter as the go-between, *Sweet Charity's* producers Barry and Fran Weissler and the Gran Centenario team hammered out a deal. Talks began with the suggestion of putting the tequila logo on *Sweet Charity* ads. For the marketer, "that wasn't enough," Ms. Miller said. "Ours is a unique brand." She and Mr. Arano concluded they wanted a deal with three components: a product mention in the show, incorporated in a natural, unobtrusive manner; an uncontrived product placement; and promotional and public relations programs to build brand awareness among the marketer's target audience.

To Mr. Weissler, having products placed or mentioned in his shows is not a new concept. "There's nothing different here than in sports or movies where marketers co-promote a film," he said. But he sets limits on what he'll do to marry art and commerce. "We never, ever distress a script." With this Gran Centenario example, the producers and playwright replaced a line, "I'll have a double scotch on the rocks" with a mention of the premium tequila. "We didn't bastardize the script, and [playwright Neil Simon] OKed the change," Mr. Weissler said. "We always pass sponsors by authors."



Amy Willstatter is selling product placements into Broadway theater productions.

Script changed, logos on set

In addition to having the Gran Centenario mention written into the script, the tequila's logos are integrated into the show's set in one scene, and the product has been the drink of choice at Gran Centenario-sponsored parties thrown during the pre-Broadway shows as well as its New York opening, all attended by the cast, their friends and a select group of invitees. Specialty cocktails featuring Gran Centenario created by well-known bartender Dale deGroff are featured at those fests as well as in the Al Hirschfeld Theatre where *Sweet Charity* plays and at nearby bars.

A print ad, adapted from the tequila's current print campaign, runs in *Sweet Charity* Playbills (where, on one of the credits pages, Gran Centenario is thanked for its "generous support"). Gran Centenario promotes the show through ads and events, and the show's ads mention the tequila.

Neither the marketer, Mr. Weissler nor Ms. Willstatter would comment on the financial specifics, other than to describe the arrangement as a flat-rate package structured as a "step deal," in which payments were made in increments. Ms. Willstatter, a proponent of cash deals rather than barter agreements for branded entertainment on Broadway, explains that she's trying to "make Broadway competitive with other forms of media, such as TV and radio."

Measuring effectiveness

One major difference, of course, between Broadway and TV or radio, is that measuring the effectiveness of a product mention or a sponsorship is art rather than science. While Mr. Weissler and Ms. Willstatter deliver their marketing partners demographic data like income of their audiences, the definite impact on audiences is not tracked. "We don't poll theatergoers," Mr. Weissler said.

But Gran Centenario's Ms. Miller does monitor Gran Centenario consumption in the theatre as well as in nearby bars. She watches the tequila's distribution in stores and bars where theatergoers shop or frequent for indications that Gran Centenario is gaining popularity.

Asked whether she's concerned about the outcry from some over the inclusion of the tequila in the play's dialogue (one paper wrote, "Sponsorship should not mean authorship, or the license to tweak creative work to make it sell when it should simply sing."), Ms. Miller said no. "We believed it was the correct fit. The press has built brand awareness."