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- News
- Technology
- Markets
- Personal Journal
- Opinion
- Leisure/Weekend

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Discussions  
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## Questions For... Amy Willstatter

### Product-Placement Consultant Finds Her Niche on Broadway

By **NEIL PARMAR**  
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL  
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Amy Willstatter is a matchmaker at heart. As president of Bridge to Hollywood & Broadway, a New York City advertising consultancy, she is one of the brokers behind Broadway's newfound love for product-placement offerings.

After working for a decade at Saatchi & Saatchi, Ms. Willstatter launched her consultancy in 2001. She arranged product-placement deals that showed Britney Spears using Herbal Essence shampoo in the film "Crossroads" and the Aflac insurance duck flapping about in the recent children's movie "Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events."



David M. Russell

"My goal is to make Broadway and national tours a viable platform for advertisers when they are considering ways to reach their consumer," says Amy Willstatter.

Recently she has moved into Broadway, negotiating a deal where Gran Centenario, a tequila made by alcoholic-beverage giant Jose Cuervo International, was written into the script of the Broadway revival of "Sweet Charity." As part of the deal, the tequila's logo appears on a podium during the show and the spirit is sold at bars in the theater and restaurants within a one-block radius of the theater.

With both Web portal Yahoo and Spam canned meat being scripted into this year's Tony Award-winning musical, "Spamalot," product placement has made a strong debut on Broadway. Below, Ms. Willstatter talks about reviving an old

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advertisement

marketing strategy for a new arena.

**The Wall Street Journal:** *Product placement has long been a source of ancillary revenue for film studios and television networks in Hollywood, but what makes this kind of marketing appealing to advertisers who want show time on Broadway?*

**Amy Willstatter:** Right now, advertisers are saying, "Wait a minute. It's costing me so much to buy a 30-second spot. My ad agencies are supposed to be my brand stewards, but they're not coming up with shows that match my [advertising] objectives." My goal is to make Broadway and national tours a viable platform for advertisers when they are considering ways to reach their consumer. I'm doing that because the television marketplace is really cluttered.

**WSJ:** *Showing a brand of beer in a television show is one thing, but how did you get executives from Gran Centenario to market their tequila on a Broadway show like "Sweet Charity?"*

**Ms. Willstatter:** It's not a Disney show. It's about a dance-hall girl. So we talked about "Sweet Charity" and about all the ways in which the brand could get involved, such as having Gran Centenario's logo on collateral materials like print ads, window cards and posters. But what they were interested in was a product placement, cash-element deal...In exchange for the company's name being mentioned and the logo showing up, the show's producers received certain amounts of money.

**WSJ:** *In addition to getting stage time, Gran Centenario tequila also is mixed in special cocktails that are sold at the theater's bar during nightly intermissions. Isn't there a risk of audience backlash at such heavy marketing?*

**Ms. Willstatter:** If it's badly done, yes. You know what I think is badly done? The amount of commercials that play before a movie. Now you see a backlash and people aren't happy. As long as [the ad is] organic and sits well into the content, and it adds to the content, then it makes sense. Is it going to occur more? I think the producers are still sensitive to it. I don't think they're going to alienate their customer. But if you have the right show, then it will make the experience more fun.

**WSJ:** *How does a company convince theatergoers that advertising can be "fun?"*

**Ms. Willstatter:** If you look at Spam and "Spamalot" it was a no-brainer. They created a limited-edition Spam can and gave them out to audience members, which was great fun. They created little events around their advertising because the platform was there.

**WSJ:** *Aren't playwrights and cast members offended by the encroachment of advertising on their creativity?*

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**Ms. Willstatter:** None of these deals are going to happen if your creative team feels unhappy. It's not just about signing the deal and taking the money. You need to facilitate communication. We worked together on marketing and press on the last day of rehearsal and Gran Centenario wasn't seen as a sponsor, but as part of the production. They got to know the cast and came out to the cast party. It was intimate.

**WSJ:** *Advertisers are increasingly placing pressure on TV networks to develop technology that could better measure the effectiveness of product placement in TV shows. How would you measure a brand's effect on theatergoers?*

**Ms. Willstatter:** I think theater's different. There's no way of calculating return on investment. This is more about live theater and establishing an intimacy with the brand. Gran Centenario had no brand awareness before and now they've been on the front page of the New York Times. It also depends on the brand's objective.

**WSJ:** *If theatergoers aren't part of an advertiser's target audience, how do you find the right venue to meet their objective?*

**Ms. Willstatter:** In this world, every brand manager is saying to their agencies, 'what's the new thing?' There are wireless forms of feeding content, and I'm exploring everything. If I had an advertiser who was targeting a young male or "tween" girl, I would aggressively go after the videogame market. I would also go after the wireless form of entertainment.

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