

ADVERTISING

Who's That Grl? Svedka Vodka Brings a Mascot to TV

By STUART ELLIOTT

THESE are all sorts of strange characters pitching products on television, among them a jovial giant, as green as the vegetables he peddles; a bald man in a white T-shirt, obsessed with cleanliness; and an insurance-loving lizard with a Cockney accent. Now their ranks are being joined by a sensual female robot from the future who adores vodka.

The so-called fembot is the character for Svedka, an increasingly popular vodka brand imported from Sweden, which is taking to television advertising for the first time. The initial TV commercial, which will double as a video clip online, is part of a new campaign for Svedka, created internally, that carries the theme "R. U. Bot or Not?"

Svedka joins a long list of distilled spirits that have started to use television as an ad medium in this country. Since 1996, when stations and networks began rewriting decades-old policies against running liquor spots, major labels like Bacardi, Captain Morgan and Johnnie Walker have added TV to their media schedules along with mainstays like magazines, billboards and the Internet.

That arrival on video has been accelerating recently as local stations in major markets owned by the largest broadcast networks — ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC — accept liquor commercials. (The policies against carrying such commercials nationally on those networks remain unchanged.)

Many other vodkas have preceded Svedka onto TV, including bigger brands like Absolut, Grey Goose and Smirnoff. As sales of Svedka continue to grow, it becomes economically feasible for the brand to spend the additional money that advertising on television requires.

"TV is important because it gives you the reach to get more visible," said Marina Hahn, senior vice president for mar-



Svedka vodka, which is imported from Sweden, joins the list of liquor brands advertising on local television.

keting at Constellation Brands in New York, which oversees Svedka.

Impact, the influential trade publication from M. Shanken Communications, calls Svedka "the market's hottest brand for several years running," with an average annual compound growth rate in case distribution of 42 percent from 2004 to 2009.

One reason for that growth, Impact reported in its Jan. 1-15 issue, is Svedka's price — higher than domestic brands like Smirnoff but "well below" that of rival imports like Absolut, Ketel One and Stolichnaya.

That made a significant difference last year as consumers drank more, according to data from the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, but switched to lower-priced products be-

cause of the economy.

As crucial as price is, Ms. Hahn said, "you've got to do more than sell on price," particularly in the vodka category.

"More and more, image is of paramount importance," she added, as a "gazillion vodkas are entering the market."

The Svedka image, in ads that have run since 2005, is playful, even naughty, featuring the sexy fembot symbolizing the brand's fanciful futuristic achievement of being voted the "No. 1 vodka" in the year 2033.

"Our vision of the future is very different" from others, Ms. Hahn said, in that the ads present 2033 as "a lot like today, but better, more fun" and Svedka as the vodka that lets you "be your fun, flirta-

tious self."

"It's good to have some release in this dire time," she added, "at a price point you can afford."

The fun-filled spirit comes across in the new campaign, which also includes print and online ads, signs in stores, billboards, events in bars and nightclubs and a presence on Facebook. There are plans for Svedka to also be on Twitter and YouTube, Ms. Hahn said.

The commercial uses computer-generated imagery to bring to life the fembot, known as Svedka Grl, in a dance-club setting.

Joining the character are hip-looking nightlife denizens who do the robot dance to a version of "Dancing Machine"

by the Jackson 5, as remixed by Scott Spock, a songwriter and producer.

The commercial was conceived by Tom Campbell, who oversees the internal creative team for Svedka, and directed by Francis Lawrence, a director of music videos.

"Maybe one day, 'Svedka Grl, the Movie,'" Ms. Hahn said, laughing.

(That may not be as far-fetched as it sounds. Another Svedka competitor, Skyy vodka, sold by Gruppo Campari, built an elaborate promotional campaign around the 2008 movie "Sex and the City" and, MediaPost Marketing Daily reported last week, is creating a similar campaign for "Sex and the City 2," coming in May.)

The Svedka commercial is scheduled to start running on Monday on four cable channels that accept liquor ads: Bravo, Comedy Central, E! and FX. The spot is to appear on series like "Chelsea Lately," "The Colbert Report," "The Daily Show With Jon Stewart," "Damages," "Kell on Earth," "Millionaire Matchmaker," "Shear Genius," "Sons of Anarchy" and "Top Chef."

On E!, a cocktail made with Svedka, called the Hot Bot, is to be featured during its live "After Party" show on March 7 that will follow the Academy Awards.

The campaign is to appear through mid-April, then return in September and run through most of October. The budget is estimated at more than \$20 million, half of which is to be earmarked for the television, print, online and outdoor ads.

According to Kantar Media, a unit of WPP that tracks ad spending, Constellation spent \$5.6 million to advertise Svedka in major media last year, up 42.5 percent from the \$3.9 million spent in 2007.

In the first nine months of 2009, \$4.8 million was spent to advertise Svedka in major media, Kantar Media reported, an increase of 4.8 percent from the \$4.5 million spent during the same period in 2008. (Full-year figures for 2009 are not yet available.)