

Meteor 'Apprentice' sponsorship may be just the job

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The mobile firm is hoping the 'significant' sum it paid to be the show's title sponsor pays off, writes **SIOBHÁN O'CONNELL**

TV3'S HIT show *The Apprentice* is back for another season and its producer, Shinawil, has performed miracles in lining up sponsors to make the series possible.

The Apprentice has a lead sponsor in Meteor, 13 gold sponsors, 15 bronze sponsors and 23 "thank you" sponsors.

The gold sponsors include big brands Ford, GlaxosmithKline, HB, Microsoft, Samsung, Spar, Cadbury, Diageo and BQ, as well as local brands the Wright Venue, Appleby, Big Red Book and Brightwater. Samsung certainly got value for money on this week's show, when the task given to the competing teams centred on devising a promo for a Samsung mobile phone.

Meteor marketing director Conor Carmody won't say how much the mobile-phone company is paying to be the title sponsor, beyond noting that it is a "significant investment".

The sponsorship gets Meteor the usual branding stings around the show but, to add value, Carmody's marketing team have to do lots of other things too.

"How people consume media is changing and viewers want to be a part of the programme they are watching," he says.

"Making a sponsorship work across a number of different platforms is how brands will get leverage in the future."

In addition to its presence on Facebook and Bebo and a customer forum on its website, Meteor has devised an entertainment package around *The Apprentice* that includes comedy stings at the start and end of each programme. Meteor is also running a website, www.apprenticeunseen.ie, which broadcasts clips not shown on the television show.

To encourage interaction, the mobile company is running its own version of *The Apprentice* with a mobile portal competition for Meteor customers to compete for an internship in Meteor's marketing department.

So far, this year's *Apprentice* is outperforming the 2008 series, with 13 per cent more viewers and, on average, 256,000 individuals viewing each show, according to Initiative Media's broadcast manager, Garrett Tallon.

Meteor's goal is the same as it was for Jacob's in 1962 when it first sponsored television awards: to sell more product. According to Carmody, on Monday nights when the show is broadcast, there is an immediate surge in traffic to the Meteor website.

"It's very early days but we can see new business coming through. In our retail stores, we are giving new customers an *Apprentice* pack so we can easily track new customer numbers."

FEW MAGAZINES participate in the Joint National Readership Survey (JNRS), the bible for media

planners when buying advertising in newspapers.

Instead, magazines rely on research collected by TGI, which monitors general consumer consumption patterns.

The latest TGI data reveals that Ireland's best-read magazine is SkyMag, with an estimated average issue readership of 597,000. The other titles in TGI's top 10 are RTÉ Guide, Hello!, OK, Buy Sell, Now, National Geographic, Irish Farmer's Journal (notwithstanding that it is a newspaper according to Audit Bureau of Circulation definitions), Auto Trader and Heat.

So how do media planners rate the TGI data compared with the JNRS? According to Paul McCabe, managing director of MCM Communications: "TGI is very good at giving us a broad sweep of the likes and dislikes of the population. But the fundamental problem of TGI is its sample size.

"The sample size of the JNRS is 7,000 people, which makes it the second-most robust survey of the population after the census. The sample size of TGI is just over 3,000. That makes it less reliable. The majority of the magazines in the 2009 TGI survey do not have a sample size of more than 100 and that is not statistically reliable."

He adds: "I use TGI in a situation where I have already come up with my own hypothesis and I refer to TGI to see whether my hypothesis is true or not. For example, I would believe working-class people are more likely to smoke John Player Blue than they are Marlboro Lights. I would look at TGI to see if that is true."

Garret Monahan of advertising agency Carat says TGI is the now main source of research for magazine readership. "The TGI data is quite good. It's not meant to be a pure media research tool. It's more about consumer purchasing habits," he says.

"There are more lifestyle-oriented questions in the TGI than in JNRS and you can drill down into all sorts of consumer habits of magazine readers. In an ideal world, you would love the JNRS to have the same depth of analysis."