



The death of the 30 second spot?

Introduction

Welcome to issue three of **Fast Forward**, ZenithOptimedia's marketing newsletter. In this issue we discuss the alleged death of the 30 second spot, the traditional unit of television advertising. We brought experts in sponsorship (from Sponsorship Intelligence), product placement (Propaganda), production (Coast) and broadcasting (Discovery Networks) to talk to us about the subject.

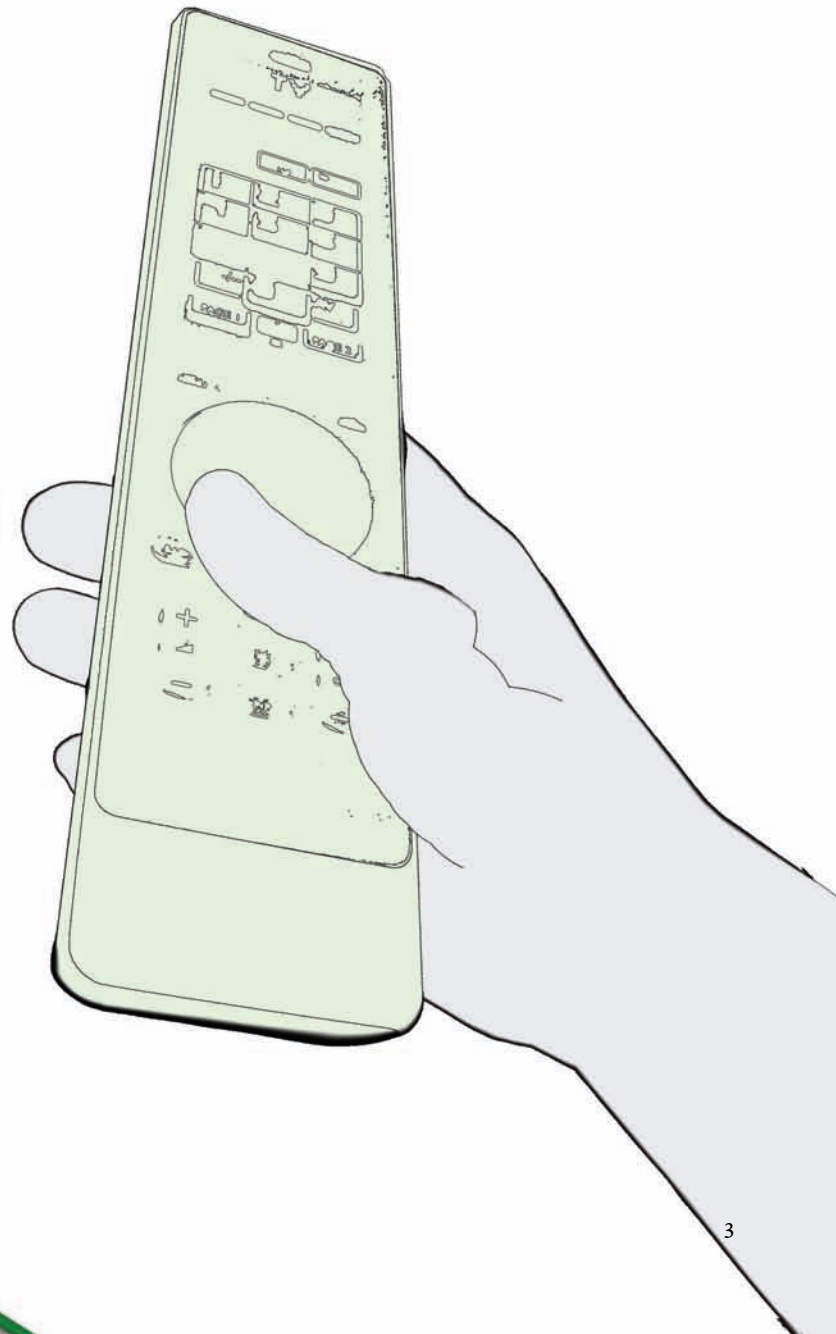
Among other topics, we discussed how effective the 30 second spot is now, how to make better use of it and combine it with other forms of marketing, the reality of ad avoidance and what can be done about it, and how to get brands into television programmes. This newsletter contains only the highlights of the wide-ranging conversation we had.

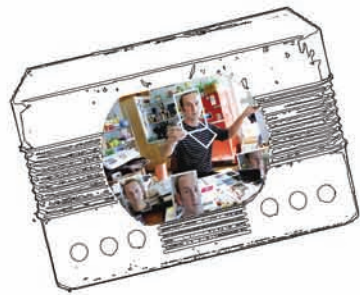
Jonathan Barnard (ZenithOptimedia)
Mick Brown (Coast)
Jonathan Gladwin (Propaganda)
Andy Kowalczyk (Sponsorship Intelligence)
Nick Lawrie (Sponsorship Intelligence)
Rupert McPetrie (ZenithOptimedia)
Jules Robinson (Discovery Networks)



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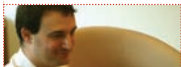
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Is the 30 second spot dying?

Television is changing. Digital television has greatly expanded the number of television channels available to viewers; technology like the Personal Video Recorder (PVR) has allowed viewers to take more control over their viewing experience; and the internet has very quickly become a strong competitor for consumers' time. Several commentators have suggested that these developments have made the 30 second spot much less effective, and may even be killing it. It is too early to talk of the death of the spot, which retains a lot of its power, but agencies have to work harder to get the most out of it.



Jonathan Barnard (ZenithOptimedia):

So, do we think the 30 second spot is dying?



Rupert McPetrie (ZenithOptimedia):

Absolutely not. I think it's a great question for us to address. The TV landscape is changing so much and the fact that we have such a diverse range of people in the room is testament to that. The challenge for us all is how to use TV effectively. The 30 second spot used to be the only answer, but there are so many more opportunities. You can argue that the effectiveness of the 30 second spot in isolation has diminished, but the 30 second spot still plays an important role as part of an overall communications plan in television.

In fact, as technology progresses and the areas in which we can behave commercially expand, the 30 second spot will probably make the plan much more effective.



Jules Robinson (Discovery):

I think creativity is important. The 30 second spot is all about creativity and the message. Marketers are having to work harder now and be cleverer to gain impact. The 30 second spot is not dying, but marketers have to think more about how to use it, and how it works with other forms of marketing.



Andy Kowalczyk (Sponsorship Intelligence):

Sport plays an important role in mass TV because it's one thing that people will all converge to watch. It will help keep the 30 second spot powerful. When the World Cup is on, people want to go to a trusted broadcaster and hear their favourite pundits, so you'll always get big audiences watching that coverage.

"Marketers are having to work harder now and be cleverer to gain impact. The 30 second spot is not dying, but marketers have to think more about how to use it, and how it works with other forms of marketing."

Jules Robinson (Discovery)

Jonathan Barnard (ZenithOptimedia):

And watching it live, as well.



Nick Lawrie (Sponsorship Intelligence):

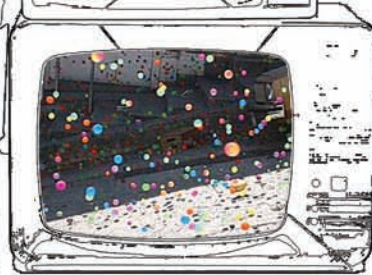
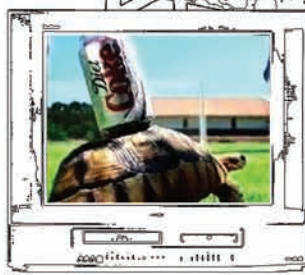
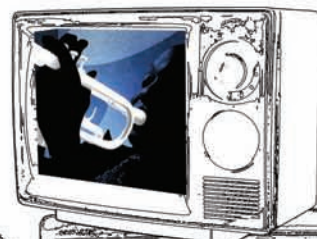
Look at the Super Bowl, for instance. It's the one event that can draw the whole of America together, and advertisers pay millions for their 30 seconds.

Jules Robinson (Discovery): It's the biggest live showcase of advertising, possibly in the world. They are traditional ads.

Jonathan Barnard (ZenithOptimedia): In the Super Bowl the ads are an event in themselves. The next day they'll be analysed in newspapers around the world. It's a great example of how ads are still a form of entertainment.

Jules Robinson (Discovery):

When I do focus groups, everyone starts off saying, 'As soon as I see the ads I get up and walk out'. Twenty minutes later, they're saying, 'I love that ad', and they relay it word for word. I think people like advertising more than they'll ever admit.





Making better use of the 30 second spot

Television advertising works better when it is relevant to the viewer. Advertising can be made relevant by forging a relationship between the spot and the programme that surrounds it: either a direct relationship (such as a car ad in Formula 1 coverage), or an indirect one (such as a beer ad with a rugby theme in rugby

coverage). Ads can also be tailored to the channel in which they appear, particularly if the channel serves a special interest.

Rupert McPetrie (ZenithOptimedia): Agencies - both creative and media - have tried to make the traditional spot that bit more effective. They are looking to the future, but still using the foundation of the 30 second spot. Think of interactive ads, which have been around for a while now. More recently, think of live ads - a beer ad in the Rugby World Cup, for example, which showed the score at half time. That to me is brilliant because, one, this is the right brand for the programme and, two, you're exploiting the technology, making the ad that much more relevant and engaging.

If you have a time-sensitive message you need to pick a programme that consumers will watch live.

Some people may record a match and watch it a week later, but it's old news by then. It's the same with reality TV. You don't want to be a week behind when you're talking at the water-cooler.

Jules Robinson (Discovery): I think it's all about relevance.

Mick Brown (Coast): You need to look at the 30 second spot through its relationship with the editorial, which is the reason why the consumer is there in the first place. The challenge is to contextualise the message. The media and the creative should come together to reflect the particular interests of the consumer. You want to get your message to the consumer through an interest that you demonstrate you both share.

But in mass TV, you don't normally make your ad to work around a particular programme, because you don't know where it's going to go. The media buyer can put it in the context of the target audience, but not of the editorial, unless you have very specifically set out to make an ad that is around that programme. That does happen, but it's not common.

Jules Robinson (Discovery): I think fundamentally people are still making ads to appeal to a specific audience. You then have to find the right environment.

Mick Brown (Coast): You take the consumer through a shared interest, which is the hook, to a message about your brand. That way necessitates multiple creative executions.

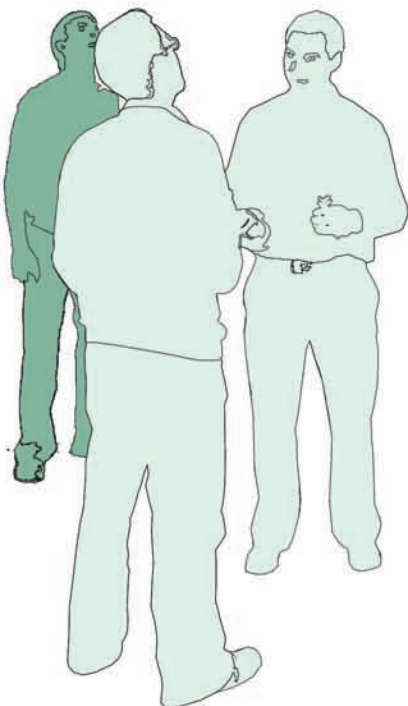
Rupert McPetrie (ZenithOptimedia): The onus is always on the buyer to get the most appropriate placement. The TV buyer will always look for a creative buy; even if you have a fairly generic mass-market ad, you can find resonance with programmes that are relevant. Or you say, 'OK, we know there are four things that are relevant for the brand. Let's say, Formula 1, football, high-quality drama and adventure programming. Let's get four bits of copy that work

with all those programmes.' The media buyer would love to have that at his disposal.

"The challenge is to contextualise the message. The media and the creative should come together to reflect the particular interests of the consumer. You want to get your message to the consumer through an interest that you demonstrate you both share."

Mick Brown (Coast)

Jules Robinson (Discovery): We have lots of clients taking their 30 second ad, which is used across many channels, and adding to that a vignette piece that localises it to each channel. They're using that 30 seconds for broad messaging and then adding on a bit that fits it into the environment.





Extending the 30 second spot

Agencies have to make better use of the spot because viewers have more choice and power over what they watch. However, the technology that gives viewers this choice and power also allows agencies to understand more about viewers and assess the effect of television advertising more accurately. It allows agencies to extend campaigns that are based on the 30 second spot into other forms of media and marketing. These work together with the spot to engage the viewer and forge a stronger relationship between the viewer and the brand.

Nick Lawrie (Sponsorship Intelligence): Media owners are now offering much more diverse platforms, so a marketer can come in with creative ideas for a 30 second spot but also link into all sorts of other media elements.



Rupert McPetrie (ZenithOptimedia): I think that creativity comes in two forms; there's the actual creative of the commercial, but there's also the creative way in which we use media and all the means of reaching the target market. Part of the bigger question is, given the choice and power that viewers now have, how do we move from just exposure, which a 30 second prime-time spot gives us, to engagement? We really need to communicate, almost on a personal basis, with the viewer. The viewer can now choose to watch programmes through a TV, through a PC or on a mobile phone. There are so many different points for viewing the message that our job as an agency has become that much more complicated. But if we conduct research and gain insight from media owners, then the effectiveness can be that much greater.

Andy Kowalczyk (Sponsorship Intelligence): It used to be very much a case of push; you used to push these 30 second ads out to a mass of people, hoping that a certain number would pick up that ad, recall it and then go out and buy that product. Now it's a lot more about pulling people toward you and your brand and your product, through TV, internet and all the different platforms.

Jules Robinson (Discovery): We have a very media-savvy audience. People know when they're being sold to. This means we have to be clever, and expand beyond the 30 second spot, rather than see the death of it. This would then mean extending campaigns online and introducing competitions to increase exposure, as well as putting them into context within the programmes they air in.

Rupert McPetrie (ZenithOptimedia): The good news about the way the market is evolving is that everyone has to think more, not just because there's choice, but because new technologies help us understand

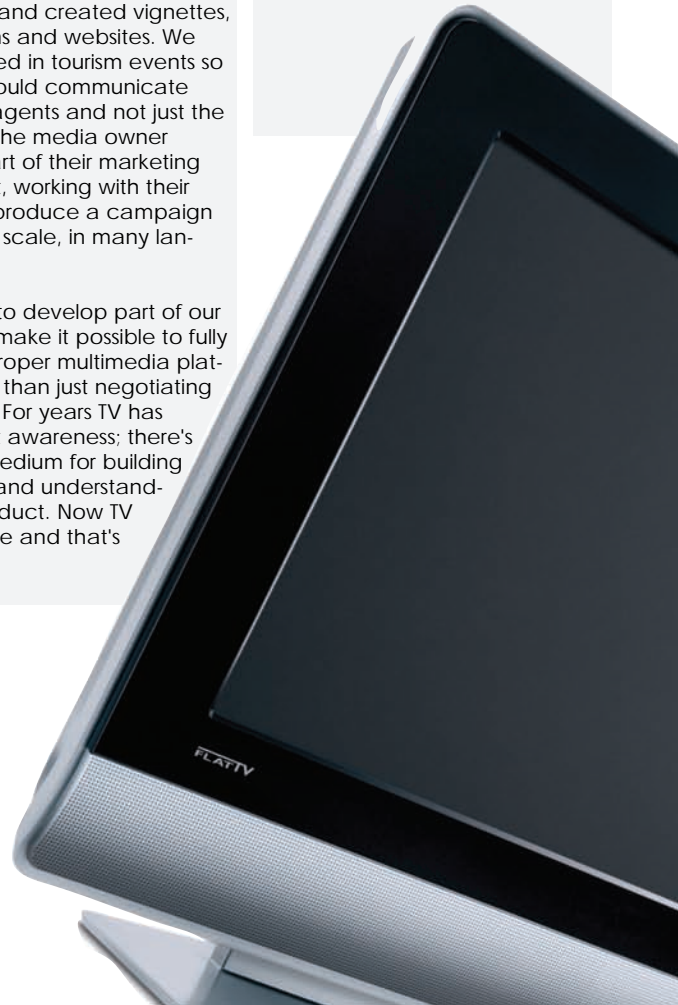
more about viewing and purchasing behaviour in digital homes. It's only once you have the proof of that relationship between exposure and engagement that we can then really understand how well the 30 second spot works, and how it interacts with the surrounding content and other points of contact.

Jules Robinson (Discovery): Taking a step back, the heart of a campaign is the client's creative, the way they want to be presented and the message they want to get across. We are asked how we can take our shows and use them to make the creative more relevant. We can then create online content and hold special events. For instance, we put together a massive, global package for a tourism office, where we used relevant shows and created vignettes, competitions and websites. We were involved in tourism events so the client could communicate with travel agents and not just the consumer. The media owner became part of their marketing department, working with their agency to produce a campaign on a global scale, in many languages.

We've had to develop part of our business to make it possible to fully sponsor a proper multimedia platform, rather than just negotiating an ad spot. For years TV has been about awareness; there's no better medium for building awareness and understanding of a product. Now TV can do more and that's exciting.

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Rupert McPetrie (ZenithOptimedia)



Ad avoidance, relevance and incentives

PVRs and internet video make it easier for viewers to avoid ads, though by no means all those who have the ability to avoid ads actually do. Still, the spread of ad-avoidance technology makes it important to ensure that ads are relevant to viewers, and to give viewers reasons to pay attention to them.

Rupert McPetrie (ZenithOptimedia): The conventional wisdom is that traditional media is suffering as technology develops. To a degree that's true, but people actually watch more television when they have more choice. We have to be a bit smarter about where we try to reach these people because the audience is more fragmented, but more choice does mean more viewing.

When you look at early audience data from homes with PVRs, a lot of programmes were being recorded and a lot of the playback was being fast forwarded through the ads. That gave us a problem. But the people who bought this equipment were the early adopters, who don't have traditional viewing habits anyway and have a high understanding of the kit. In fact, as the universe of those who have PVRs increases, the ad avoidance data suggests that we're not missing all that much commercial viewing. Ad avoidance is a challenge and we'd be foolish not to think about how we can deal with that in the future, but there are already some great examples of a more creative approach being used to try and negate that effect.

Mick Brown (Coast): But don't people still flick through the ads?

Rupert McPetrie (ZenithOptimedia): You're right that when people record programmes, a proportion of them do fast forward the ads. But those who don't are more attentive to the advertising, because they have selected that programme and taken the time to sit down and watch it.

Andy Kowlaczyk (Sponsorship Intelligence): Internet penetration is high and broadband speeds are getting to the level where we can actually watch high-quality coverage on our PCs. At that point you can avoid the ads.

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Rupert McPetrie (ZenithOptimedia): There are ways of signposting the ads that are about to come on air. Look at the listing pages in your newspaper on your way home; there will be some signposting for an ad that will be on later tonight. You can signpost on air. We did it for one of our clients; we got the channel to say at the end of the programme, 'Stay tuned to this break to see this exciting development about your credit card'.

Looking to the future, are there ways that we can use this technology, which we perceive as a threat, to force

engagement? Can we make people watch an ad? Or do we incentivise them? The broadcaster can let viewers earn reward points by watching ads, for example.

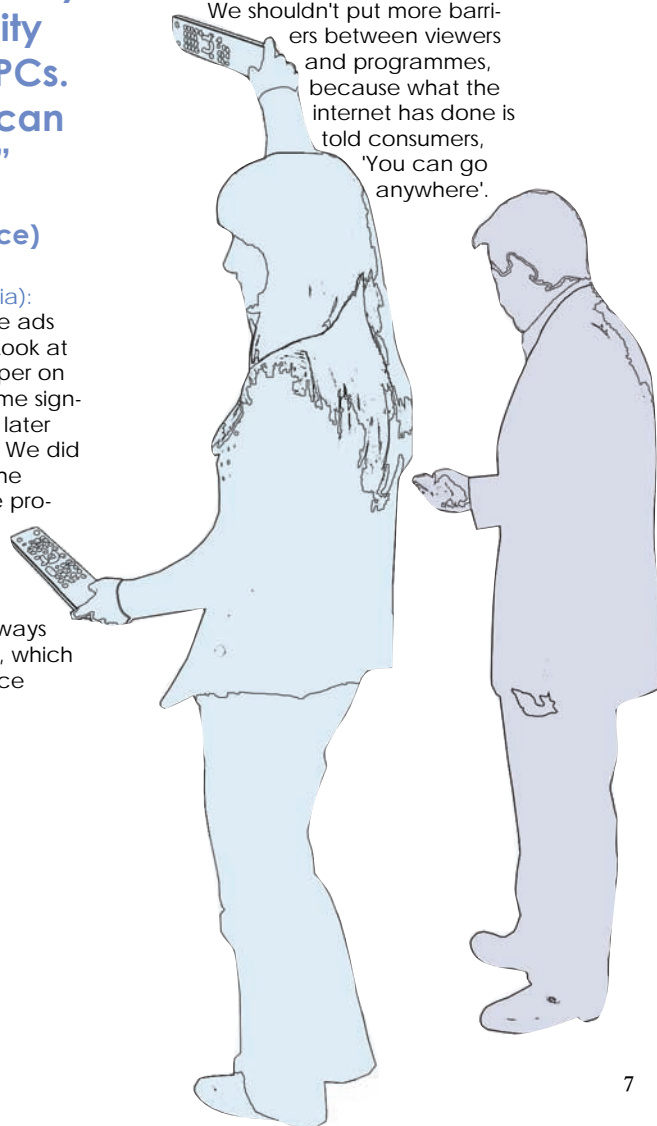


Andy Kowlaczyk (Sponsorship Intelligence): You have to give people reasons to watch ads.

Mick Brown (Coast): Consumers are asking why the advertiser is there. Advertisers need to ask how they can be relevant.

Jules Robinson (Discovery): I think it's still fundamentally about programmes, and entertaining people or informing people in the right way. You've got to be careful about forcing someone to do something that then ruins their experience.

We shouldn't put more barriers between viewers and programmes, because what the internet has done is told consumers, 'You can go anywhere'.



Getting brands into programmes

Even if viewers start avoiding ads in large numbers, they won't be able to avoid brands that appear in the programmes they watch, hence the growing interest in sponsorship and product placement. Product placement rules vary from country to country; it is common in the Americas and Asia, but banned (at least in most forms) in much of Europe. Even in countries where it is banned, brands can often be placed in programmes where their appearance is editorially justified, as long as there is no editorial interference.

Wherever it takes place, product placement needs to be conducted carefully, to avoid alienating the viewer and ensure the broadcaster retains its credibility.

In the future, technology is likely to make product placement more powerful, by allowing viewers to find information about the products they see on screen, or even buy them, with a touch of a button or click of a mouse. This technology should also do the same for the 30 second spot, by helping advertisers interact and engage with viewers more closely.


 **Andy Kowalczyk (Sponsorship Intelligence):** Product placement and sponsorship - having brands exposed within coverage - are becoming so

important now, because you can't avoid them. Break sponsorship is very good because it tells viewers who are fast forwarding the ads when the programme will start again.

 **Mick Brown (Coast):** Because it's a signpost.

"We've got to make sure the audience feels comfortable with the brand being there. And audiences expect to see the brands in programmes."

Jonathan Gladwin (Propaganda)

 **Jonathan Barnard (ZenithOptimedia):**

Clearly, we have to be very sensitive about how we get brands into content.

 **Jonathan Gladwin (Propaganda):**

It's about making sure that the programmes we're working on fit with the brand, and making that fit right and relevant for the audience. We've got to make sure the audience feels comfortable with the brand being there. And audiences expect to see the brands in programmes. They don't expect to see no brands in a programme, because that doesn't feel right. We're

all surrounded by brands every day. The day it becomes uncomfortable is when viewers feels a brand has been shoehorned into a show where it doesn't fit.

Mick Brown (Coast): The problem is when you want to make the product the hero and you focus in too much on it; nobody wants that.

Jonathan Gladwin (Propaganda): It's the difference between the product being the hero and being just part and parcel of the action. But you want it to be natural; you don't want it to jar. Leave the production company to naturalise the products in the shows, then let the 30 second ad do all the sales pitch in that controlled space.

Andy Kowalczyk (Sponsorship Intelligence): I don't think brands have to be too sensitive about product placement, because people are savvy now; they understand what's going on. They understand that these programmes need investment. We've done a lot of research that shows people don't mind sponsors being there any more, as long as they don't get too intrusive and the sponsorship is relevant and in context.



Jules Robinson (Discovery): The main point I've picked up from this is the question of how to bring brands into programmes and how to pull down the walls, without affecting the credibility of the broadcaster. Fundamentally, I think broadcasters need to retain the responsibility for the quality of their programming.

Andy Kowalczyk (Sponsorship Intelligence): There will be more options in the future. I saw Microsoft give a presentation on new technology, using *Friends* as an example. You clicked on Rachel's jacket and the television took you to a shop where you could actually buy that jacket. It stopped the programme coverage, allowed you to buy the jacket and, when you'd finished, carried on from where it left off.

Jonathan Gladwin (Propaganda): I think that's the key, getting products into the content and allowing people to adapt to that. As technology develops we will be able to go from seeing a product in a programme to buying it, and to click on on-screen text to go to a website.

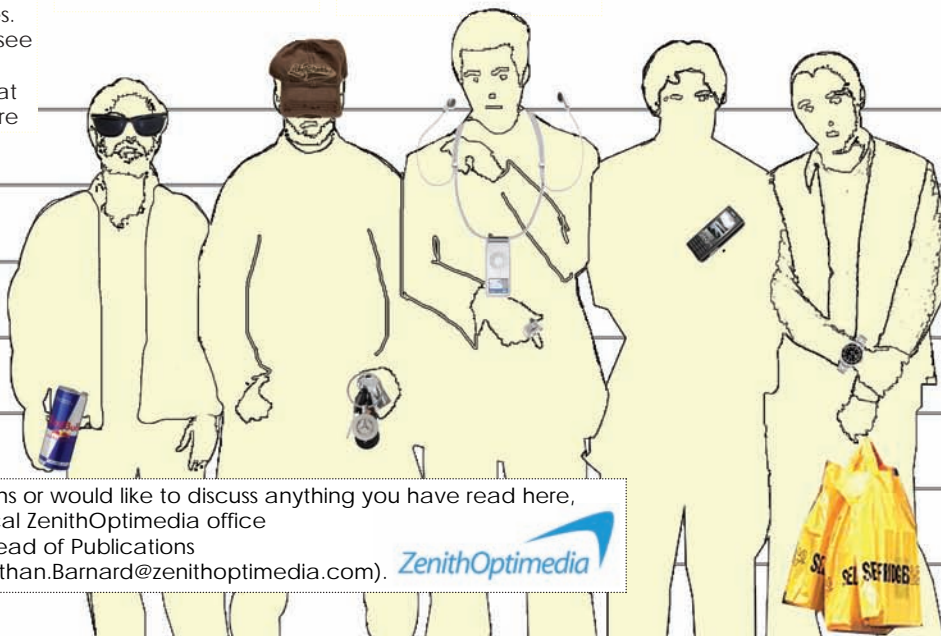
Jules Robinson (Discovery): We have interactive TV now, so there is already a two-way process in TV. Now video creators and broadcasters are exploring this online.

Jonathan Barnard (ZenithOptimedia): Going back to the 30 second spot, we already have interactive ads, but the scope of interaction is still quite limited. As this sort of technology becomes more

"...people don't mind sponsors being there any more, as long as they don't get too intrusive and the sponsorship is relevant."

Andy Kowalczyk (Sponsorship Intelligence)

common, it will allow us to do so much more with television ads: to take consumers directly from ad to website to purchase, for example, or engage them with personalised content.



If you have any questions or would like to discuss anything you have read here, please contact your local ZenithOptimedia office or Jonathan Barnard, Head of Publications (+44 20 7961 1192, Jonathan.Barnard@zenithoptimedia.com).

