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Sonic Meshes Spots with MTV's 'The Hills'

Restaurant chain tries new direction with 'The Stalls'

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-By Brian Morrissey



Pete and T.J. take a new approach in Barkley's latest spots for Sonic.

NEW YORK Sonic is taking its long-running Pete and T.J. commercial duo in a new direction, running a series of spots that mimic MTV drama *The Hills*.

Sonic crafted 14 spots showing the characters in their customary positions in a car at a Sonic. In the first ad, which aired last night, T.J. explains (over a banana pudding shake) that he's met the girl of his dreams. The commercials end with a "to be continued." In subsequent spots, Pete and T.J. discuss banana pudding shakes some more and decide to move to Los Angeles to pursue romance, only to discover they've fallen for the same woman.

The 14-week push is part of an effort by Sonic, traditionally strong with males, to reach young women, said Paul Macaluso, vp, marketing at the restaurant chain.

Sonic spend more than \$100 million in measured media through July 2008, after spending nearly \$180 million during all of last year.

"The target audience is really key for us," he said. "It's a key demographic for us and our business. We'll be monitoring how this campaign resonates with them."

Sonic's agency, independent Barkley in Kansas City, Mo., paints the "miniseries" of spots, titled *The Stalls*, as an evolution of the characters, which have starred in the fast-food chain's commercials for the past five years. The shop worked to mirror the sturm und drang of *The Hills*, which tracks the twists and turns of a young woman new to Los Angeles.

"People really love the characters, much like they'd love the characters on *The Hills*," said Brian Brooker, CEO and chief creative officer at Barkley. "We thought it was the perfect campaign to do something different."

Barkley built a microsite that also mimics *The Hills* online venue, giving character back stories, along with prior episodes of *The Stalls*. It will also link to a Sonic-sponsored sweepstakes to win a trip to the series' season-finale party.

The idea of marrying the creative so closely with the content sprung from Barkley's media arm, Brooker said.

"Anytime media and creative can come together you're going to have a better product," he said. "This is a great example of doing that."

Sonic is also sponsoring "The Backchannel," the online companion game to *The Hills*.