Country Star Faith Hill Peddles Petals in Super Bowl Ad

Teleflora's using a sweet Southern drawl to sell flowers, replacing the bawdy barbs of standup comic Don Rickles with country singer Faith Hill in its upcoming Super Bowl ad, Feb. 6.

With more than 40 million records sold, “Faith has a huge fan base and her appeal is strong across various musical genres,” said Teleflora President Shawn Weidmann. Additionally, football fans already recognize and like Hill, as she’s sung the opening theme to kick off NBC’s “Sunday Night Football” for the past four years, he said.

For the last two Super Bowls, a box of wilting flowers hurling insults at the recipient was the centerpiece of Teleflora’s ad campaign — their much talked-about strategy for conveying the importance of hand-arranged, hand-delivered arrangements by local florists. BusinessWeek.com described the ad as having the “best online buzz for the buck,” having generated a 1,464 percent increase in number of online mentions for Teleflora, Weidmann said.

Although pleased with these results, Weidmann said it was necessary for the company to find new ways to engage with customers and “continue to push the envelope.”

The 30-second spot will feature Hill in a recording studio where she steps in to coach her sound tech through a Valentine’s Day dilemma. Like “talking flowers,” the new ad will use humor “to break through the clutter to create water cooler conversation,” Weidmann said. The ad will air during the second quarter of the Super Bowl and will run through Feb. 12 on sports-focused cable channels and primetime cable shows geared towards male viewers.

The ad debuts “the Valentine’s Bouquet,” the lead arrangement in Teleflora’s new product line, “The Collection by Faith Hill.”

Teleflora’s not the only advertiser turning to female celebrities for its Super Bowl ads — Skechers is using reality TV star Kim Kardashian, and GoDaddy.com will feature racecar driver Danica Patrick and workout queen Jillian Michaels, according to USA Today.

Jennifer Pryor, owner of White House Florist in Lexington, S.C., looks forward to watching the commercial. “I think Faith Hill will be a great fit,” she said, adding, “any chance to have a celebrity promote flowers is a good thing!” Rick Canale, owner of Exotic Flowers in Boston, agreed. “I think the celebrity endorsement is long overdue for our industry,” he said. “Our last, Merlin Olsen, was a great spokesman, but certainly not a brand and not a trail blazer.”

Weidmann said his goal with the ad is to drive consumers to visit their local Teleflora florist and raise awareness for purchasing flowers in general. Reaching an estimated 100 million Super Bowl viewers, “this kind of advertising benefits our members and it’s something an individual florist could not do on his or her own,” Weidmann said.

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Scholarships Offer Hands-On Experience for Horticulture Students

Floriculture students looking to get out of the classroom and get their hands dirty — figuratively and literally — have a shot at doing so through one of two scholarships offered by the American Floral Endowment.

The Vic & Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship Program, established in 1992 by a generous gift from Vic and Margaret Ball, funds training at floriculture production greenhouses throughout the U.S. The Ball program allows for a 3-, 4- or 6-month paid internship experience, and awards a scholarship ($1,500, $3,000 or $6,000) at the completion.

The Mosmiller Intern Scholarship Program, established in 1975, helps support students who participate in internships at a retail florist, wholesaler or allied trade company. The paid internship lasts between 10-14 weeks and awards a $2,000 scholarship upon completion.

Recipients must be a U.S. citizen currently enrolled in a floriculture/environmental horticulture program at a 2- or 4-year college or university in the U.S., maintain a “C” or better GPA and complete the internship prior to graduation.

Applications are due March 1 in the spring and October 1 in the fall. Go to www.endowment.org/education.

Growth Opportunity 2008 AFE scholarship recipients Hana Sumbera, Texas State University, and Paul Jemison, Kansas State University, get hands on experience as interns at Molbak’s Garden and Home in Woodinville, Wash.