

## Viewers (still) accept product placement

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TORONTO — When Jack Bauer is in hot pursuit of terrorists on 24, or when CSI Miami's Horatio Caine arrives at a crime scene, many viewers are well aware that their heroes are driving a Ford Expedition and a Hummer respectively.

And they don't seem to mind the obvious product placement, according to a new poll by Decima Research.

Product Placement is a growing trend on prime-time TV. It's when a producer and an advertiser agree to provide high visibility to a product within the body of a program, instead of during a traditional commercial break. It is an obvious end run around the fact that viewers now make heavy use of fast forwarding through ads with their VCRs or personal digital recorders.

According to a Decima survey of vehicle brands displayed within the body of network shows, 56 per cent of viewers of CSI Miami were able to identify the Hummer as the vehicle used by star David Caruso. Among viewers of 24, 37 per cent correctly identified the Ford as the vehicle of choice of star Kiefer Sutherland.

Sometimes, it doesn't work.

Only six per cent correctly identified the Nissan Titan displayed on Desperate Housewives.

But on shows like American Idol and The Apprentice, there is major recognition of the commercial products prominently used in them.

As for whether people found product placement effective as advertising or a turn-off, Decima says they actually are not all that bothered by it.

Sixty-nine per cent of those polled said it was effective, only 48 per cent said they found it intrusive.

"For those who are wondering whether advertisers are gaining share of mind through product placement, these results are a solid affirmation of the approach," says Bruce Anderson, Decima CEO. "These numbers imply a pretty solid level of acceptance of this evolving form of advertising."

The national online survey was conducted between March 31 and April 4. Results are based on a sample of just over 1,500 adult English-speaking Canadians. The findings are considered accurate to within 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Of course product placement is hardly a new media phenomenon. Forty years ago on The Danny Thomas Show, the stars would be acting out a scene in the kitchen and segue seamlessly and brashly into a commercial for Post TV cereals. The animated opening credits of early episodes of Bewitched would show the characters riding atop the Chevrolet logo.

And fans of the holiday movie A Christmas Story delight in the scene, based on early radio broadcasts, in which Ralphie feverishly de-codes a "secret" message delivered via his favourite program, Little Orphan Annie, only to be disgusted to find it's a plug for the sponsor, Ovaltine.