

## Panel puts products in place

By Kimberly Speight

The increased presence of product integration in TV programming does not mean that advertisers should or will ultimately have creative control over the content, a panel of industry experts said Wednesday.

Ideally, "a genuinely dialed-in (advertising) client would say to the creative community, 'Here's what my brand is and what we like, but we're not going to tell you how to do (a show),' " said Michael Wright, senior vp original programming at TNT. "Rather than telling us how to craft a show, it would be: 'Let us tell you what we would like it to be at the end.' "

The panel was speaking during the Caucus for Television Producers, Writers & Directors' 31st Reunion and Birthday Lunch at the Peninsula Hotel in Beverly Hills.

Panelist Peter Benedek, co-founder and partner of UTA, cited NBC's "The Apprentice," CBS' "Survivor" and ABC's "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" as examples of reality shows that have successfully incorporated product integration but added that "we have yet to see a true home run in the scripted business."

Benedek also pointed out that product integration is perceived differently in TV programming than it is in feature films.

"No one raises an eye about what goes in the movie business, but if it's in TV, everybody gets offended," he said. "What's that about?"

Robert J. Dowling, editor-in-chief and publisher of The Hollywood Reporter, offered a theory as to why that perception exists.

"It strikes me that when people leave their houses, they accept the fact that they are vulnerable to being assaulted by messages," said Dowling, who moderated the discussion. "When they're in their homes, they are able to control the things they allow in; they know when the commercial starts. That's one difference between successful product integration and commercials."

William Morris Consulting vp Paul Furia added that successful product integration must be seamless and suggested that advertisers must get involved in a project early on in the development process.

"Advertisers must have adequate lead time for them to be involved — even before the scripts are delivered," he said. "Then they'll be able to let (the networks) know if they have something they can play around with."

Other panelists included Cindy Gallop, chairman of Bartle Bogle Hegarty Llc. and co-chairman of the Branded Content Marketing Assn.; Tom Mazza, president and co-founder of Madison Road Entertainment; and Roy Salter, principal at the Salter Group.