

PR WEEK

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MEDIA HOME AND LIFESTYLE

MEDIA ROUNDUP

Lifestyle's upswing proves PR can always go home

Home and home-improvement outlets are defying economic trends with continued growth and increased advertising. Their traditional editorial boundaries have been softened by a more general lifestyle approach, and customers are responding with enthusiasm. David Ward reports

Whether it stems from an instinctive need toward nesting, a return to the traditional values of hearth and home, or simply baby boomers settling down and acquiring wealth, there's no doubt that consumer interest in home and lifestyle is on the rise—and the media has taken notice.

Traditional "shelter books" such as *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Metropolitan Home*, and *Architectural Digest* have been joined in the past 15 years by a host of newer publications such as *Dwell*, *Simple Living*, and *Lucky*.

Much of the credit for this current boom can be traced to Martha Stewart. "She's the one that reinvented all this cozy, homey stuff," says Patti Londre, president of The Londre Company. "She was the one that showed every single angle." Now there are a host of television programs and an entire network (HGTV) devoted to home and home style. Even MTV is in on the act with its new *Cribs* series, which showcases the homes of music stars.

Part of the consumer appeal of many of these media outlets is their complete lack of controversy. In many ways, they provide a kind of escapist entertainment similar to sitcoms and movies. "They're very easy on the eyes," notes Londre, who represents Wedgwood, the famed maker of china and other fine ceramics. "If you want to feel good or you need inspiration, you go to these magazines."

Eric Yaverbaum, president of Jericho Communications, which represents IKEA, says that unlike most media outlets, home/lifestyle writing often takes a back seat to visuals. "This and the fashion industry are very picture-driven," he says. And like the fashion industry, many of these outlets promise that if you follow their advice, you'll never commit an interior-design faux pas. "The reporters either have good taste or they're wannabes, but any way you shake it, they fashion themselves as arbiters of taste."

With many consumers actually ripping the pictures out of these maga-



Relax... opportunities abound for getting coverage in 'shelter books'

zines to take with them when they go shopping, Londre notes that the market to get products featured in these home interior pictorials is very competitive. "It helps when you come to them with a known brand," she says.

Clear editorial mission

Matt Messinger, senior account supervisor with The MWW Group, says the good thing about many of these outlets is that they have a very defined editorial mission and readership. But occasionally, he says, the logistics of reaching out to publications are complicated by their limited staff. "A lot of times, you're dealing with freelancers. More and more, these lifestyle reporters are finding trends on their own, researching them and pitching them to publications."

That applies to newspapers as well, many of which have established dedicated weekly sections focusing on lifestyle and home improvements. "Again, you're dealing with a lot of freelancers and syndicated columnists, so a

New Jersey paper may have a story from the *Los Angeles Times*," he says.

Bill Daddi, EVP with Lippe Taylor, which represents integrated retailers such as The White Barn Candle Company, says many of these outlets have long leads, which necessitates pitching them three to six months in advance. Daddi also notes that many of them have shifted away from aspirational features on dream or fantasy homes to a more practical approach. "They want to have products that their readers can actually go out and buy," he says. "They don't want to frustrate people."

If there has been a criticism of these "shelter books" in the past, it's that they often failed to separate editorial decisions from advertising. "At one time, *Architectural Digest* had a point of only mentioning advertisers," says Yaverbaum, who quickly adds that the vast majority of lifestyle publications now make an effort to keep editorial separate from advertising.

Among the most influential journal-

Where to go

HOME TITLES: *Home*; *InStyle*; *Better Homes and Gardens*; *Good Housekeeping*; *Elle Décor*; *House Beautiful*; *Real Simple*; *Martha Stewart Living*; *Dwell*; *Nest*; *Metropolis*; *Architectural Digest*; *Interior Design*; *Family Circle*; *Women's Day*; *Metropolitan Home*; *Country Home*; *Country Living*; *Midwest Living*; *Homestyle*; *Electronic House*

HOME IMPROVEMENT TITLES: *This Old House*; *The Family Handyman*; *Handy*

TRADE TITLES: *HFN*; *Furniture Style*; *Furniture Today*; *Furniture World*; *InFurniture*; *Home Accents Today*; *Home Textiles Today*

TV & RADIO: HGTV; *Oxygen Network*; *Style Network*; *Discovery Channel*; *E!*; *MTV*; *Martha Stewart Living* (syndicated); *Better Homes and Gardens* (syndicated); *This Old House*; *Home Again*; *Hometime*

INTERNET: DIYOnline.com; MSNBC

show them the company's roots and corporate headquarters, as well as new products before anyone else has seen them.

Jericho also tries to place IKEA in the middle of trend stories, such as a recent rise in the popularity of inflatable furniture. "We furnished a golf course in California with air furniture that still generates articles today," says Yaverbaum, "and that was two years ago."

The other major beneficiary of home magazines has been the home-improvement industry. Thanks again to icons such as Martha Stewart and Bob Villa (formerly of *This Old House*), the traditional lines between male-centric home-improvement media outlets and shelter books has been blurring. Milwaukee-based Cramer-Krasselt, which represents Briggs & Stratton and Dremel, points out that a recent survey found 44% of people rank home-improvement projects as their number-one leisure activity. Cramer recently completed an editorial tour on behalf of Briggs & Stratton, meeting with 23 editors from 19 magazines, including traditional women's publications such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Country Living*, *Home*, *Woman's Day*, and *Family Circle*.

Cramer PR vice president Bobby Holcombe says that while many Briggs & Stratton products are focused on outside the home (such as gardening), many home magazines are now including such topics in their lifestyle coverage. "It's been kind of fun for us to see the growth of these magazines," he says. "There's this whole wider segment of an audience that now fits right in line with what we do."

PR execs say the best way to reach these publications is by building relationships with key editorial members, and then being very responsive to requests for art and products for inclusion in coverage.

A sure sign of the strength of the category is that even in this depressed advertising environment, home and home-improvement coverage continues to grow. "Advertising in this category is up," says Yaverbaum. "The *New York Times* recently introduced a special style and entertainment insert that they do twice a year now to pick up some of those overflow ad dollars. So there are more places for us to go now."

The on-air options

In addition to networks such as HGTV and the Style Network, PR people point to the morning network programs and daytime fare such as *The View*, *Rosie*, and most notably *Oprah*, as prime outlets for home products and furnishings. "We had a whole product segment on *Oprah*," says Jericho's Yaverbaum. "We worked on that segment for four or five months, but of course, it was worth it."

Yaverbaum says IKEA regularly accommodates lifestyle journalists, and has an annual press trip to Sweden to