

## Hard Rock picks new agency to 'ad' to hotel's party

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The Hard Rock Casino and Hotel awarded New York-based advertising agency DiMassimo Brand Advertising a \$10 million to \$15 million contract to broaden the casino's brand appeal as a center of revelry among its core young and trendy clientele in targeted cities.

The move comes on the heels of last month's settlement before the state Gaming Control Board at which the casino agreed to pay \$300,000 in order to end complaints about three separate ads. The ads were deemed by the board as explicit in sexual content as well as containing remarks referring to drug use and cheating.

Selected from among more than 40 competing agencies across the country, DiMassimo will design a campaign generally bypassing traditional print and broadcast media outlets and instead concentrating on promotional events along with booklets and other materials to reinforce the Hard Rock's market position and generate word-of-mouth interest in the property.

"We didn't want a basic sexy billboard that everyone else is doing in Las Vegas," says Phil Shalala, vice president of marketing for Hard Rock. "We don't react to what other casinos are doing. Our demographic is so different. It is a younger, hipper [crowd] that is not traditional gamers."

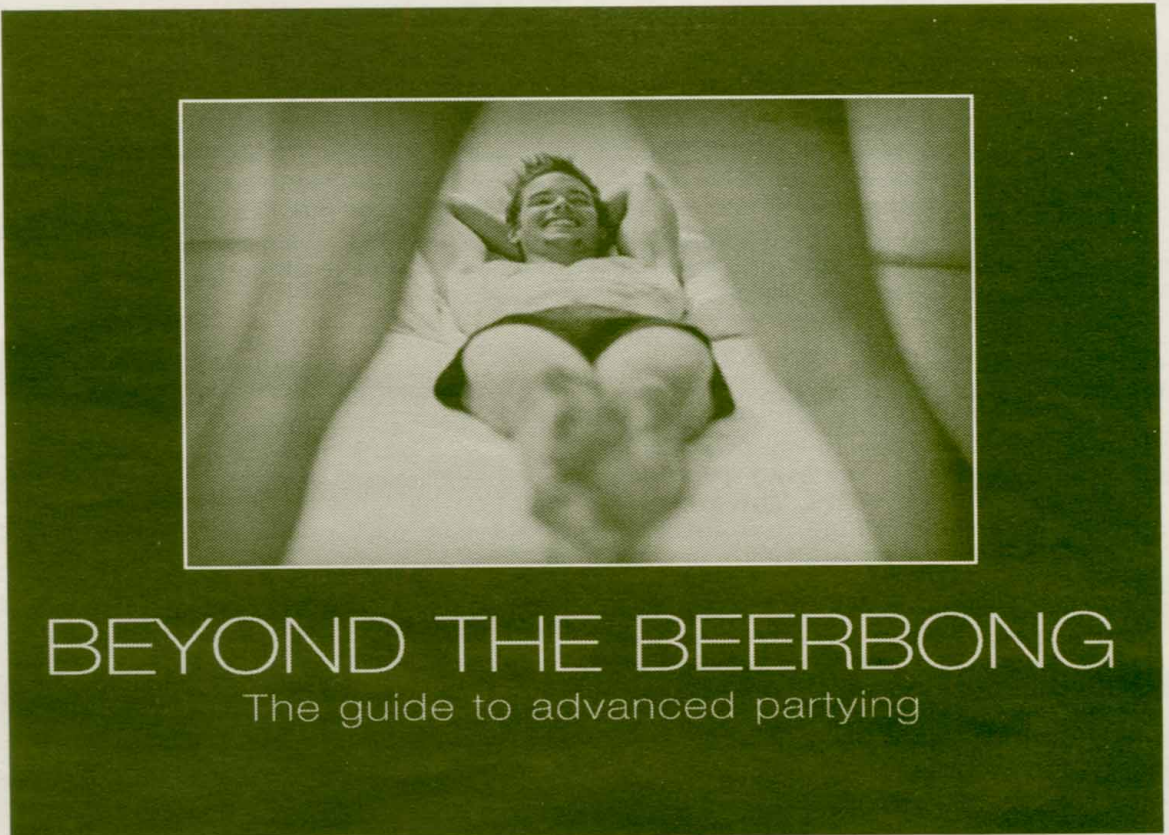
Expected to begin in the next two to three months, the campaign will target key markets such as Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City and San Diego. Although the exact content of the campaign is under development, the campaign is expected to drive the Hard Rock's market by producing excitement using promotional and public relations techniques at events and programs.

Although not finalized, one possible concept introduced as DiMassimo's pitch was the creation of a "camera room" that would broadcast festivities at the casino live to different audiences.

"We don't think of it as a campaign because it is not necessarily covering media and grassroots marketing," says Shalala. "[DiMassimo] will do some projects for us but it doesn't fall into line of a specific strategy. It will continue to evolve what the Hard Rock brand stands for. We will judge the success [of the operation] based on the amount of buzz it creates, whether it creates new media-opportunity events, and whether it gets new and more customers."

According to Mark DiMassimo, the founder and creative director of the agency, the message will focus on the concept of "advanced partying" to signify a level of enjoyment more sophisticated than mere carousing and will be transmitted in a number of ways, such as a how-to booklet.

"Advanced partying is the idea to drive the entire brand," he says. "When



### BEYOND THE BEERBONG

The guide to advanced partying

A sample of the new Hard Rock Casino's advertising campaign.

Photo courtesy of DiMassimo Brand Advertising

you're ready to do advanced partying and leave behind the frat boy and swinger's scene, then go to the Hard Rock. The ad campaign will promote the how-to etiquette of advanced partying to make that night at the Hard Rock one not to forget but will later deny."

The agency plans to push the campaign at high visibility sites in the major markets, such as Times Square in New York City and along Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, to increase the effectiveness by generating a "buzz" about the events.

"Instead of just getting the message through, we will have people involved so they talk about it," says DiMassimo. "Word-of-mouth is truly the best advertising."

While the emphasis on non-traditional, below-the-line marketing methods will stretch the suggested budget further as well as DiMassimo's resources, the approach has been the agency's forte since its start in 1996 and should give added impact as DiMassimo enters the Las Vegas market and the casino industry with its first client here.

"There are good agencies in [Las Vegas] that understand the lay of the land," the agency's owner says. "We need to do a good job. It's easier to come up with a television ad for millions [of dollars] and run it again and again. Our marketing tactics are less profitable for the agency but more effective for the client."

According to Shalala, DiMassimo was chosen to handle the account because the agency's one and a half hour presentation, including a poster with a young man on a bed seen through the shapely outstretched legs of a woman carrying the title "Beyond the Beerbong," matched the Hard Rock's identity of a property beyond the Strip.

"They didn't come up with a typical

ad campaign that shoots the hottest girl out there and puts our name on it and calls it cool," Shalala says. "It proved to me that they are thinkers. In addition, they made us laugh. Our customers hate to be advertised to but they like to laugh."

How much of that content will translate into the final product remains to be seen in light of the recent settlement with the Gaming Control Board. While arguing that the references to cheating and drug use were the primary points for the board's complaint, Board Chairman Dennis Neilander was reportedly troubled that previous Hard Rock ads had reneged an agreement with Hard Rock to limit sexual content.

"Right from the beginning, Hard Rock told us that they went to places they would not go again," says DiMassimo. "Being a good citizen and [working with] the Gaming Control Board is a top priority. On the other hand, partying is partying and any town where the slogan 'What happens here, stays here' applies [is not a conventional place]. In the whole country, the issue of decency affects all clients and agencies. We will be sensitive and sophisticated, but we won't be overly fearful."

With billings totaling \$150 million last year from clients such as the Plaza Hotel in New York, Comcast, Pfizer and Instinet online brokerage, DiMassimo says the high profile of the Hard Rock account means more than just the net worth. He notes that his agency has already received a couple of referrals since gaining the Hard Rock as a client.

"[The referrals] are visionary, entrepreneurial clients," he says. "What it is, is what it says about the Hard Rock. They are not just another casino on the Strip. They are a premium brand."