

AdvertisingAge®

CUBA'S INTERNATIONAL BRAND HAVANA CLUB RUM CO-PRODUCES FILM **Pernod Ricard-Owned Drink Uses City's Lively Cultural Scene in Its Marketing**

Published: July 07, 2011

As one of Cuba's very, very few international brands, Pernod Ricard-owned Havana Club rum uses Cuba itself as a marketing tool. Capitalizing on Havana's lively, sultry cultural scene, the company is co-financing a feature film called "Seven Days in Havana" to be screened in cinemas around the world next summer.



The film, created with M&C Saatchi, Paris, is a contemporary portrait of Cuba's capital city, with a different director for each of the seven days. One director, for instance, is Oscar-winning actor Benicio del Toro.

There is contractually no product placement in "Seven Days in Havana," although because the film was shot in Cuba, and Havana Club is one of the few alcoholic drinks brands in the country, the rum features in the finished product.

Daniel Fohr, founder and creative director at M&C Saatchi, Paris, said, "Everyone who goes to Havana is in contact with Havana Club. It is everywhere in Havana -- people drink it in every bar and carry it on every street."

Cuba is not a place anyone would expect to find the marketing director for an international brand, but Yves Schladenhaufen, who holds that role for Havana Club, is a Frenchman who has been living in Cuba for three years.

"As a Cuban brand, it is more natural for us to do this [film] than to do a classic TV or print ad," he said. "We don't want to push the brand artificially -- this is an opportunity to communicate the humanity and spirit of the brand, and consumers react better to content than to an ad message."

Havana Club is No. 28 in a ranking of the Top 100 Most Powerful Spirit and Wine Brands 2011 by Intangible Business, a brand-valuation consultancy. That's only one spot below Veuve Clicquot champagne and three behind Gordon's Gin. In a company report called "15 Strategic Brands," Pernod Ricard said Havana Club has averaged 16% annual growth in sales since 1994.

Mr. Schladenhaufen said, "It is still a small brand but it is starting to reach critical mass. In Germany and Italy, Havana Club is bigger than Bacardi, although people don't know it. Its popularity has grown in bars along with the popularity of the mojito." Other important markets for Havana Club include Spain, France, Greece and the U.K.

Like Cuban cigars, Havana Club can't be sold or advertised in the U.S. because of the embargo on Cuban products, but Pernod Ricard is hoping that "Seven Days in Havana" will be shown in America.

M&C Saatchi's Mr. Fohr said, "Because it's a work of art, it is excluded from the embargo. People can't drink Havana Club in the U.S., but they can watch other people drink it!"

The 100-minute film continues Havana Club's focus on Cuban culture and creativity. Havana Club, produced at a distillery in San Jose, Cuba, has been promoted since 2006 with an ad campaign using the slogan "El Culto a la Vida" and regularly updates a website featuring contemporary Cuban artists and musicians at www.havana-cultura.com.

"Seven Days in Havana" is currently in post-production. Although it was filmed by seven different directors, the whole script was written by Cuban crime writer Leonardo Padura.

Wild Bunch International has secured distribution in more than 20 markets, including Japan, France, Italy, Germany and Canada. Havana Club is planning a program of marketing activities around the launch of the film in every country, except the U.S.

Mr. Fohr added, "Producing a film offers far wider marketing opportunities. It allowed us to use far richer content and really bring to life this brand's values during the film promotion that may otherwise have been restricted in traditional advertising channels."

