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## Martha's Vineyard Summer House lets companies pitch their products to editors in a luxury setting



Advertisers are forgoing the usual pitches to woo editors in a Martha's Vineyard vacation house. Above, advertisers and editors mingle at the Summer House on Martha's Vineyard amid a wealth of products. (Bill Greene/ Globe Staff)

## Getting them where they live

## Advertisers forgo usual pitches to woo editors in Vineyard vacation house

By Jenn Abelson, Globe Staff | July 11, 2006



Fashion editor for Complex Magazine, Kelly McCabe relaxes on South Beach eating Madhouse Munchie chips and other complimentary promotional products.

**WEST TISBURY** – There's a refrigerator here dedicated solely to Magic Hat Beer, with hundreds of bottles of craft brew filling the shelves, vegetable bins, and meat drawers.

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Nearby, in the "Green Room," about three dozen Costa Del Mar sunglasses are on display, along with Aunt Sadie's premium candles and racks of clothes and shoes by Cloudveil and Clarks.

This isn't just any summer home on Martha's Vineyard. This is The Summer House, a marketing extravaganza where about 30 companies paid up to \$15,000 to put their products before a rotating crew of top New York editors and stylists who are visiting over the next two months.

It's a cross between a glorified junket and a product-placement utopia, the latest strategy for companies to get their merchandise noticed in an increasingly fragmented media landscape.

A Boston marketing firm, CerconeBrownCurtis, set up the Summer House, describing it in brochures as an "experiential marketing opportunity" -- a place to position products in their natural settings where hard-to-reach editors can taste, touch, smell, test, and review products "without distraction, no competitors."

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McCavanagh heads to South Beach from the house to deliver lunch to magazine editors.



Costa Del Mar sunglasses display at display at the "Summer House."



Madhouse Munchies chip display At the "Summer House."

The Summer House reflects a growing shift away from traditional 30-second commercials and glossy magazine advertisements toward nontraditional tactics, such as buzz marketing and product placement, said Susan Fournier, an assistant professor of marketing at Boston University's School of Management.

"People want to hear from nonmarketing sources more than ever as distrust of advertisements has grown," Fournier said. "This is the crossing of product placements with gatekeepers of the media and celebrity stylists -- it's really revolutionary in a lot of ways, and very powerful."

The Summer House, nestled in the woods near Lambert's Cove in West Tisbury, lured editors with promises of a shill-free weekend from coveted publications like Glamour, Woman's World, and Playboy and stylists from MTV and VH1 who dress celebrities and pick products to place in their own shows.

Planners refused to let company publicists visit the Vineyard haunt, instead letting professional athletes lead bike rides and tennis clinics and answer questions about products like Prince tennis rackets and Scott bicycles. Nantucket's Triple Eight Distillery is hosting mixology sessions at the Summer House to teach editors how to make drinks.

"I probably get 500 pitches a week and spend my day constantly deleting e-mail," said Joel Weber, an assistant editor at Men's Journal who reviews fashion and lifestyle products for the monthly magazine. "The Summer House is a chance for me to interact with the products outside the office without being surrounded by PR people. Their job is to be that bird that whispers in my ear, and my job is to basically swat the bird away."

CerconeBrownCurtis and the merchants offered free travel, lodging, and products to participants. Some editors declined the invitation because their publications prohibit such sponsored trips, to avoid the appearance of selling favorable coverage. The Boston Globe's reporter traveled to the Vineyard at the Globe's expense and did not use any of the products or stay overnight at The Summer House.

"Any time there's an experience like this -- you're likely to view products in a somewhat more favorable light," said Bradley Carbone, associate editor for the lifestyle publication Complex Magazine. "But this allowed us to experience products in a real-life environment. We get so many products here at the office it's difficult to actually try them."

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Below: Freelance journalist Ian Wolkoff tries a glass of Victorian House instant coffee.



Marketing and public relations director for Scott Bicycles, Adrian Montgomery grabs his Nalgene hydration pack on South Beach.

Below: Wolkoff, Carbone and Roffman head to South Beach following a bike ride on Scott bicycles with Bell helmets and Nalgene hydration packs, all complimentary.



Both Carbone and Weber said they have no problem with accepting free merchandise or the occasional junket, because their jobs involve reviewing products.

"It's important to take the opportunity and go and experience it," said Carbone, who stayed last weekend at the Summer House. "Otherwise, it would be a significant expense for the magazine to have us traveling around the country."

The Summer House experience begins in style, with guests driven from New York City in a limousine stocked with Magic Hat beer, Westport wines, and vitamin water. The three-day affairs vary slightly, but typically involve a two-hour bike ride and a lunch adventure that features more than a dozen products.

Inside the Summer House, colorful displays of Madhouse Munchies potato chips accent an otherwise pristine white kitchen. The garage looks like a bike-and-gear shop where Nalgene hydration packs hang from Yakima storage racks. Crocs sandals and Dearfoam slippers are waiting in each editor's size in a bedroom.

Photo Gallery Gallery:Summer House

Guests are reminded about the products even in the bathroom, where a brochure offers random pitches: "With Rede Golf Round Savers disposable soft cleats you don't need to buy golf shoes ever again. Just peel and stick the cleats to any shoes in which you choose to play golf and in seconds you are Rede to play."

The Summer House is "a no-brainer" for companies, said Eric Hansen, Nalgene's marketing manager. They get access to top media and don't have to compete with rivals. (Nalgene's competitor CamelBak was refused entrance to the Summer House).

Nalgene sent nearly 300 products -- including flasks and hydration packs -- so that they can be seen in the kitchen and bathrooms and during outdoor activities.

"It's a struggle to get the attention of these editors, so to have them captive for 72 hours is fantastic," Hansen said.

CerconeBrownCurtis is planning a Winter House in January near Salt Lake City, and it's considering creating a division that would be dedicated to experiential marketing.

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