



**MEDIA PLAN OF THE YEAR**

**SPENDING BETWEEN \$10 MILLION-\$25 MILLION**

# The Media Kitchen

BY ERIC SCHMUCKLER PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER MURPHY

**THE FIERCELY HARD-NOSED** category of airline advertising is not normally a place where media agencies can strut their stuff. Which is precisely why Delta Airlines chose The Media Kitchen in April 2003 to help launch Song Airlines, its new value competitor to JetBlue et al. "Delta was setting up a completely different airline with a completely different attitude," explains Paul Woolmington, CEO and head chef (really!) at The Media Kitchen. "With 48 channels of TV, on-demand video and interactive gaming, organic food from a celebrity chef, and designer uniforms by Kate Spade, it really was a new way of flying. Style is the overarching experience."

## **FLYING ACES**

(Clockwise from bottom left) Keren Eldad, Charles Pinkerton, Brooke Dubrowsky, Adam Chorney, Joel Mayne, Paul Woolmington, Andrea Bullock (middle)

"We created a lifestyle brand that just happens to be an airline," says Tim Mapes, Song's managing director of marketing. While the typical airline campaign goes after male business travelers, "we were the only one targeting female leisure and business travelers. We saw an opportunity to be 180 degrees different."

"We did a deep analysis of our consumer group and realized it's a mindset, not a demographic," says Woolmington, a chatty Brit and veteran of The Media Edge. "The Song 'enthusiast,' as we called it, was a frequent leisure traveler in our key initial markets of New York and Boston."

But Media Kitchen had to work on a short leash. "We didn't have a massive budget," recalls group director Charles Pinkerton. "The big boys spend in two weeks what we had for four months. Creatively, we had to go one-on-one, out on the street, and show [prospects] the experience rather than tell them about it. We had to be very un-airline like, which made both strategic sense and business sense."

Woolmington describes 3-year-old Media Kitchen as a "strategy- and planning-led full-service company with a truly media-neutral set-up," an agnosticism that surfaced with "a crazy, early idea. To start the conversation, we hired skywriters up and down the East Coast. A squadron of pilots spelled out the message 'Wish you were here—Fly Song.com' over fashionable beaches in the Hamptons, the Jersey shore, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket and the Florida coast." Mapes needed a fair amount of convincing to sign off on the skywriting scheme, but online sales doubled and Song picked up lots of free media coverage.

Media Kitchen favored offbeat vehicles that made the medium a part of the message. "You can use media as a critical, strategic positioning tool, as opposed to just a delivery system," says Woolmington. For example, Song hooked up with Daily Candy, an e-mail focused on the hippest restaurants, fashion, shops and entertainment to sponsor news of designer sample sales for fashion magnets like Dolce & Gabbana. The tagline: "Cashmere products at polyester prices."

Song strengthened its fashion-world ties by sponsoring New York Fashion Week on the Metro cable channel and its *Full Frontal Fashion* show (then shared with the WE cable network, now solely on WE). "We set up a lounge at Fashion Week, a mock-up of the inside of a plane, and [local cable news outlet] NY1 shot all its interviews from there," says Pinkerton. Adds Woolmington, "We reached every fashion editor and fashion influencer that week. It was a hugely covered event that created buzz and consumer reach."

For its out-of-home presence, Song headed downtown. "We decided to dominate fashionable locations in the city," says Woolmington, "and one of our first was at the corner of Broadway and Houston Street. The copy was written to refer to it: 'Fifth Avenue style at Lower East Side prices.'" In addition, there was a postcard campaign in bars, clubs and restaurants—13 different postcards emblazoned with the 'Wish you were here' tagline dominated the rack. Other street-level tactics included wild-postings in marquee downtown areas and Song-branded shopping bags handed out at the Union Square farmers' market.

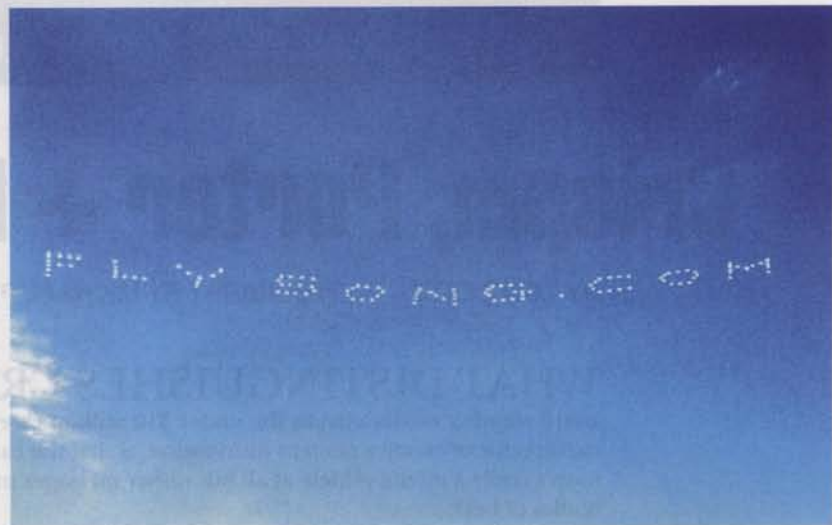
The most ambitious gambit, though, was opening the Song retail store, on ultra-hip Prince Street in Soho; an

operation spearheaded by Lime Public Relations + Promotion, Media Kitchen's sister company. "It was a total, 360-degree experience of the airline," says Woolmington, "with mocked-up seating, food you can buy in-flight, TV monitors showing all the entertainment choices, and an in-flight simulator." Opened just before Thanksgiving for 10 weeks, the store offered over 100 events, most with core corporate partners and other media partners. The editor of *Food & Wine* spoke. Disney Radio sponsored a Disney Club on Saturday mornings. A *Condé Nast Traveler* editor gave a lesson in how to pack. Michael Nishon, Song's celebrity chef, gave cooking demos. Hawkers wandered Soho with two flashlights, à la a runway crew, directing people to the happening. In all, the store averaged 1,000 visitors a day and generated an estimated 27 million free impressions.

In print, Song chose some 30 titles oriented to food, travel, style, fashion and wellness, including *Food & Wine*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Real Simple* and *Organic Living*. A sponsorship with *City* magazine led to the creation of city guides, small glued-in booklets offering a compendium of the hip and cool for each of Song's destination cities. This image-heavy campaign was bolstered by fare-conscious advertising on radio and on Internet travel sites and search engines.

The result: Song was the fastest-growing travel brand in last year's fourth quarter, says Mapes. "By every dimension, this brand has overdelivered all our projections," he asserts. "And it's driving our case internally to get more resources. We went from zero-percent brand awareness to 44 percent in the places we cared about in just five months, and in markets as expensive as New York and Boston."

"Really, I don't deserve to come to the [awards] luncheon," Mapes concludes. "The things I was most uneasy about are the very things they're being honored for, and we get to take the credit, like the skywriting and the concept store. When I heard that, I thought, 'What the hell are we doing?' and I could not have been more wrong. When an agency brings you an idea that makes you so uneasy, you just have to say, 'Let's do it.'" ■



**AIR TIME** Song Airlines' approach to advertising included using such offbeat media as skywriting, e-mail newsletters and logo-emblazoned shopping bags.