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Images USA on track with its message

March 14, 2007

BY LEWIS LAZARE Sun-Times Columnist

We were flabbergasted, quite frankly, when at lunch recently an executive at a large local public relations agency announced she recently traveled to Minneapolis from Chicago for a business meeting. That part of the revelation wasn't what floored us. Rather, it was her decision to make the trip via train, not plane.

What's more, she readily reported to all those at table the trip had gone smoothly. And comfortably. Marred by none of the hassles that typically detract from air travel these days -- weather delays, long security lines, liquids issues and more.

Of course that's not to say some of these things might not one day soon be part of the rail experience too. But for now -- presuming the rails go where you want to go when you want to -- they are looking more and more like a legitimate alternative for both leisure and business travelers.

Which might, in part, explain why Amtrak is beefing up its marketing efforts on all fronts. The national rail company recently retained Images USA in Atlanta, Ga., to develop print, radio and online campaigns aimed at multicultural audiences in the rail service's key large markets, including Chicago; New York; Los Angeles; Washington, D.C., and Miami. The campaign tag line is "Welcome on Board."

The new effort targets both leisure travelers and business executives in campaigns aimed at African Americans and Hispanics. One new print execution for African-American leisure travelers smartly plays up the big pluses in train travel over air, including the chance to see the country in which one lives and the opportunity to enjoy such pleasingly civilized touches as a dining car. What's more, the ads suggest trains really give family travelers the opportunity to spend quality time together in a relaxed environment.

Given the nightmares thousands of air travelers have endured recently because of bad weather and the tons of negative publicity the horror stories generated, this new multicultural push from Amtrak seems to be coming at just the right moment with the right message.

Lew's view: B

Ad notes

- GolinHarris was named Large PR Agency of the Year 2007 at the eighth annual PRWeek awards ceremony. The award recognizes financial and client growth, client retention and PR creativity and innovation.
- Julieann Vukovich has joined Cramer-Krasselt as its first senior vice president and director of human resources. Based in Chicago, Vukovich will have networkwide responsibilities for C-K's offices in New York, Milwaukee and Phoenix. Previously, Vukovich was at Energy BBDO/Chicago, where she spent the past 13 years in a variety of roles ranging from strategic planning to benefits administration.

The mail bag

Why brag about the subway in the Chicago 2016 Committee video (Media Mix, Mar. 7)? Has anyone on the committee taken the time to actually ride on the subway? That should be a real eye-opener.

Terri Brandys

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It's not the "Amy was paid for her story" that makes the Home Depot commercial unbelievable (Media Mix, Feb. 28). It's the fact that when I go to Home Depot, I can seldom get anyone to help me find where the garden hoses are, much less tell me how to redo an entire house.

Anne Goldberg

I wouldn't believe any ad by Home Depot. They need to spend fewer dollars on ads and hire some knowledgeable employees for their stores. They used to be a decent store, but service has deteriorated to be absolutely terrible. My husband and I avoid shopping there, as do many people we know. The reason is the same: Poor, poor service.

Pat Davis

I strongly disagree with you that because the single mom in the Home Depot commercial gets paid, the commercial is somehow less credible. If she *didn't* get paid for it, it wouldn't be very credible! Commercials make money for the company. Would you make one endorsing a product you like and do it for nothing?

Connie Orland

Howard Dean in Chicago Wednesday for funder. Will be introduced by Daley and Ald.-elect Sandi Jackson (Rep. Jesse Jackson's wife)

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