

# Ski vendors give advertisers an avalanche of opportunity

By **Theresa Howard**, USA TODAY  
NEW YORK — Go sell it on the mountain.

Advertisers are migrating to the great outdoors with ads in and around the country's 300 or so private slopes. (Advertising is not permitted in the roughly 150 national parks.)

Ski venues provide an efficient way for advertisers to reach well-heeled consumers. And ski area owners welcome the chance to make extra bucks, especially given the downhill trend in visitors. Last year, unseasonably warm temperatures led to a 5% drop in attendance, to 55 million, according to the National Ski Areas Association.

"We're getting some value," says Michael Cobb, vice president, marketing and sales, for Stratton Mountain Resort in Vermont. The additional revenue helps "pay for things like trail maps." What was once a scattered market for advertisers is becoming more streamlined as media companies consolidate ad opportunities at mountains. Sitour USA and Brand Connection are wooing major advertisers for events and samplings.

Last year Absolut used ads on giant trail maps at lodges to introduce new flavor Absolut Pears.

"It works," says Tim Murphy, Absolut's vice president of marketing. "Skiers are generally affluent, recreational, and when they are on vacation they are more receptive to trying things and spending money."

The ability to target their messages is appealing to advertisers, especially at a cost of about \$2.50 per thousand consumers vs. \$25 per thousand they would pay for television commercials. The Active Network, the outdoor ad arm for Brand Connections, says its ads on 10,000 places at 150 mountains can reach 100 million active, eco-conscious consumers. This season it has put more than 500 digital displays and plasma screens at ski areas around the country.

"When you can take a brand and seamlessly insert it into an environment where the consumer is naturally going to be in a positive state of emotion, the brand doesn't have to do any work," says Brian Martin, Brand Connections founder and CEO.

Taking to the hills:

•**Toyota.** The automaker will cover two gondolas at Stratton with a springtime Vermont mountain scene and its hybrid "engines of change" logo. "If that doesn't stand out in the snow, I don't know what will," says Don Johnson, regional truck manager for Toyota. The company will hold special promotions such as Toyota Tuesdays, when visitors driving Toyota vehicles get free ski passes.

•**Odwalla.** Ads on ski racks, plasma screens and at lift lines will promote the juice in ski areas. "It allows us to reach our consumer target while they are enjoying the outdoors," says Chris Brandt, brand manager.

•**Thinsulate.** Ads for the 3M brand that's used as insulation in coats, gloves and hats will tell consumers how Thinsulate helps them have fun longer. "It's the first season we've done anything like this," says Paul Zimmerman, Thinsulate's global brand manager. Ads will appear on plasma screens and ski racks.

•**Zicam.** The cold medicine brand will provide nearly 500,000 samples at ski area hotels and mountains this season and advertise on billboards, ski and snowboard racks, ski towers and trail maps.

"The last thing anyone needs is to go on vacation and catch a cold," says Zicam spokesman Rob Murphy.

Some mountains, however, want to limit the ad experience. At Aspen Snowmass in Colorado, advertising is restricted to trail maps enclosed in little plastic boxes on the safety bars of chair lifts.