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ADVERTISING

Like the Show? Buy the Book. And the Earrings. And the ...

By **STUART ELLIOTT**

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IF you like the TV show, why not buy the fragrance? Wear the jewelry? Read the book? Join other fans online to help write an episode?

The Showtime cable television network is pursuing that strategy to promote the third-season premiere of "The L Word," a drama about a group of friends living in Los Angeles that is its most-watched series.

To encourage viewers to tune in for the new episode, scheduled for Jan. 8, Showtime is signing agreements with marketers to introduce tie-in merchandise like perfume; a line of necklaces, bracelets, earrings, rings and watches; and a book meant to serve as a guide to the series.

There will also be a 12-week contest on a Web site, [fanlib.com](#), inviting viewers to contribute ideas for show scenes as part of a continuing story line. The contest will be overseen by a staff writer for the series, who will combine the scenes into the equivalent of an episode written by fans.

Although the "L" in "The L Word" stands for "lesbian," it seems that Showtime, a division of [Viacom](#), is hoping to

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make it mean "licensing." While licensed merchandise promoting a TV series is not new - as anyone who toted lunchboxes bearing images of Howdy Doody or "The Brady Bunch" and "Saved by the Bell" shows can attest - Showtime is seeking to extend the concept into the realm of branding.

The goal is to have fans of "The L Word" serve as brand ambassadors, as it were, using word-of-mouth or buzz marketing to generate attention for the series in addition to traditional efforts like commercials and print advertisements.

"It's treating consumers like a medium," said Matt Freeman, chief executive at Tribal DDB Worldwide in New York, part of the DDB Worldwide division of the [Omnicom Group](#).

"You're using the connection, the energy, the passion they have," he added, "and marshaling it on behalf of your brand."

Showtime needs all the passion it can muster. With 13.5 million subscribers, compared with 28 million for the leader in pay cable TV, the HBO division of Time Warner, Showtime must build awareness for its programming by almost any means necessary.

"We're building brand equity for the show and Showtime, which is something that has historically been a challenge for us," said Matt Blank, chairman and chief executive of Showtime Networks.

"There is a value in 'The L Word' as a brand name," Mr. Blank added, "and we're bringing the brand to places it hasn't been before."

One such place is high-end retail shops like Fred Segal, Barneys and Gump's, where the women's fragrance inspired by "The L Word," called L eau de parfum, will go on sale in mid-February. The perfume, to be priced at \$75 for a 50-milliliter bottle, will be sold by Ron Robinson Inc. of Los Angeles, which does business in those shops under the name Apothia.

"It cannot be a gimmick, because stores like Barneys don't

need another fragrance," said Ron Robinson, president of the company, which developed the perfume along with a company called Through Smoke Creative. The development process included meetings with Mr. Blank and Eileen Chaiken, the creator of "The L Word"; watching previous episodes of the series on DVD; and asking fans whose names were provided by Showtime to take part in a survey on the Apothia Web site (apothia.com).

The survey - 17 questions for fans about themselves and what they want in a fragrance - drew a surprisingly large response, from 7,500 women, Mr. Robinson said.

A result is a scent intended to personify "the overall sensibility and sensuality of the show," he added, and its "confident, independent, strong, romantic, very feminine and very sexy characters."

Presumably, L eau de parfum will differ from another TV tie-in fragrance, called Enchantment, that was introduced last year in [Wal-Mart](#) stores. That scent was inspired by a plot line on "All My Children," the long-running soap opera on ABC. The trade publication Broadcasting and Cable reported this week that Wal-Mart is adding other products inspired by "All My Children," bearing the Fusion brand name, including an eau de toilette spray.

The jewelry line, to be called The L Word Collection, is also scheduled to be introduced in February. The merchandise will be marketed by a New York company called Love and Pride, which sells the work of a jewelry designer named Udi Behr primarily to gay and lesbian consumers. The company's interest in licensed merchandise is not unexpected, given that one partner, Marco de Plano, is president of an ad agency, the De Plano Group.

"The goal is to get marketing partners that have the same objectives you do and are trying to reach the same audience," Mr. de Plano said. That made the new line "a natural extension" of what Love and Pride already sells.

Mr. Behr said that The L Word Collection will be priced from \$30 to \$1,000, with most items \$100 and under. The company also plans a line of jewelry named after another Showtime series, "Queer as Folk," which completed a five-

season run on Aug. 7.

Both Ron Robinson Inc. and Love and Pride have signed two-year licensing agreements with Showtime to use "The L Word" name and imagery, and both agreements have renewal options.

Showtime will get guaranteed fees under both deals, Mr. Blank said, along with a percentage of revenue from the fragrance sales; further financial terms are not being disclosed.

"We're not looking for this to have a giant financial impact," Mr. Blank said, but rather "it's about 'The L Word' being part of the pop culture."

That is also the reasoning behind the book, "The L Word: Welcome to Our Planet," due in March from another Viacom unit, Fireside/Simon & Schuster, as well as the online fan-fiction contest.

The Web site playing host to the contest, FanLib, owned by My2Centences, "believes in what we call 'people-powered entertainment,'" said Chris Williams, chief executive of FanLib in West Hollywood, Calif., echoing the idea of viewers as brand ambassadors.

The contest "is the honey that attracts bees to a hive for 'The L Word,'" he added, "and that is what is so compelling about this for Showtime." Information about the contest will be available at lword.fanlib.com.

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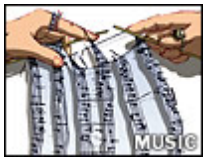
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