

Start of war the end for many ads

Advertisers to pull spots as they assess the national mood

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Local advertisers plan to pull television spots for an indefinite period because of the war with Iraq. And some might alter the content to be attuned to the national climate.

While local broadcasters expect to provide nonstop, commercial-free coverage of the war in its initial stages, some advertisers are making plans to go dark for up to seven days.

Coors Brewing Co. plans to remove its party-hearty ads until a time when audiences might be more receptive. "My sense is there is already some holding back, a wait-and-see-what-happens before making a commitment," said Cindy Velasquez, vice president and general manager of Denver's 7.

The station had received instructions from at least 25 advertisers, outlining the preferred treatment for their ads upon the outbreak of war. The go-dark orders range from 48 hours to seven days, said John McCormick, general sales manager.

"Dollarwise, it represents quite a bit," McCormick said, declining to estimate a precise impact on revenues. "But it's all major stuff."

Barnhart-CMI Advertising in Denver has been counseling clients on the best strategies for war, including the amount of time to spend on the sidelines and the content of current and future ads.

"We would not recommend that someone abandon their entire media schedule," said Beth Barbee, director of client services for Barnhart.

In some cases, she said, advertisers might find that print is a more appropriate medium. And in other cases, especially for magazines, it will be too late to terminate print ads, anyway.

"A lot of the print buys have gone to bed already," said Hilary Martin, spokeswoman for Coors in Golden. "That plan can't be altered all that much."

Coors said it had planned to reduce its beer ads this month, anyway.

The company typically scales back in advance of its annual distributors convention, set to begin Monday. Coors likes to unveil new advertising campaigns at that event.

"If a war were to break out in April, we would have more (advertising) to pull," Martin said before the bombing began on Wednesday night. "We would have to evaluate it. And if it (war) is drawn out, we would probably look to rotate some creative (advertising) that we have, that highlights our brand heritage and our Rocky Mountain equities - that's less celebratory."

Martin said she didn't know whether the well-known "Twins" ads would be among the casualties.

Coors will continue to advertise via "point-of-sale" promotions and billboards, Martin said. But radio ads probably will receive treatment similar to the company's strategy for its TV ads.

Lee Larsen, vice president of Clear Channel's local radio stations, said advertisers have alerted Clear Channel to plans for cutbacks.

"Many advertisers will go as normal," he said. "Others, especially ones that have commercials they think are too light-hearted, are saying, 'Let's hold off. We'll re-evaluate, depending upon the seriousness of the situation over there.' "

Coors' withdrawal of TV ads will apply to cable and satellite as well as over-the-air programs, Martin said. But Jeannine Hansen, spokeswoman for Comcast in Denver, said some advertisers who withdraw from news channels will redirect those ads to other, entertainment-oriented programming. She did not know whether Comcast anticipates a net reduction in advertising during the initial stages of the war.

"There are a handful of businesses who have asked that their advertising be pulled," she said. "But there is also a handful of advertisers who want to increase their advertising" now that the war has begun.

Comcast and other broadcasters declined to reveal specific clients' names or plans.

The advertisers' products will largely determine when their ads return to the airwaves, said Barbee of Barnhart. Advertisers pushing travel, luxury goods and other nonessentials will probably remain on the sidelines longer than companies that sell day-to-day necessities, she said.