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NEWS

Formula to help Newcastle step up outreach for beer

By Anita Chabria

SAN DIEGO: In a bid to better explain its product to consumers, England's Newcastle Brown Ale has hired San Diego-based Formula PR for an extensive PR and marketing effort.

The account is valued at "close to a half-a-million dollars," said Formula head Michael Olguin. In addition to "traditional" PR, the campaign will include grass-roots efforts, promotions, and Hollywood outreach.

A main component of the program involves street teams, dubbed "Ale Blazers," offering samples of the product in more than 1,500 bars in about 35 markets. That program kicked off last week in Atlanta.

"Sampling is such an important factor for a beer like this," explained Bill Wetmore, market-



Newcastle... sampling is key to effort, says Wetmore

ing director for Scottish & Newcastle Importers. "It's a darker-looking beer, but it does not have a heavy, bitter taste. When we get people to try a Newcastle, and they realize it isn't as heavy as it looks, the battle is won."

He added that the street

teams were an appealing idea because Newcastle has had great success in supermarkets, but is less popular in bars in the US, despite its success in such venues in the UK.

"Being an English beer from a pub heritage, we've always been

kind of on-premise oriented, and with this effort we're trying to really get the draft to be a revitalized part of our mix," he said.

The Hollywood outreach facet of the program began with handing out the beer to celebrities backstage at the recent Billboard Music Awards. Olguin said that the event led to talks with the band Green Day to possibly provide Newcastle in their green rooms during an upcoming US concert tour.

Wetmore said that Formula was chosen based on a referral from an ad agency. Formula worked on a contest last year for the company, which led to the current AOR relationship.

"We put them on a trial run last year and were pleased with their performance, so we've locked them in," said Wetmore.