AVN eyes mainstream exposure for its awards

BY RANDI SCHMELZER
LOS ANGELES: In its 24th year, the Adult Video News (AVN) Awards Show is making a concerted play for more recognition through getting a bigger venue, pursuing wider outreach, and even attracting a few household names.

PR representatives for the awards show, which will be held on Saturday, January 13 (and aired later on Playboy TV), have made mainstream media outreach a major priority.

“Overall, the business has evolved,” said Sue Procko, whose eponymous Los Angeles-based agency handles outreach for the show in tandem with in-house teams from AVN, Las Vegas awards venue Mandalay Bay, which is hosting this year’s event, and several independent publicists.

Procko — who also works with non-adult entertainment clients — said she started seeing mainstream interest around the AVN Awards last year, when The New York Times, Reuters, and Wired, among other outlets, ran stories. Already confirmed for this year’s red carpet are AP, Newsweek, and ABC News Radio.

The show will also have its first working media room and a traditional red carpet entryway.

Radio has been a key target for promotion of the AVN awards themselves

Those who attend the awards, which will feature double the seating capability from years past, are likely to see scheduled appearances from mainstream entertainers like rockers Gene Simmons, Dave Navarro, and Buck Cherry; comedian Carrot Top; show presenter Jim Norton; and illusionist Criss Angel. And among nominees, guitarist Eddie Van Halen is up for 18 awards.

To promote the AVN Awards themselves, Procko has placed a great deal of focus on radio — from Howard Stern to Adam Carolla — and the Internet, including aggressive blog outreach and a MySpace page which went from four “to well over 1,300 friends in a two-week period.”

Members of the industry “realize the value of PR,” Procko said. “They put a lot of time and effort into media training, crisis communications... all kinds of things that weren’t going on before.”

Brian Gross, whose BSG Public Relations in Woodland Hills, CA, represents nominees including Joanna Angel, said that while there is still a stigma, “you’re dealing with a billion-dollar industry. You can’t ignore it.”

Medicare advocates ready for anticipated legislation

BY MARC LONGPRE
WASHINGTON: The new Democratic-controlled Congress is expected to push for legislation requiring the government to negotiate lower drug prices for Medicare beneficiaries. As such, advocacy and policy groups hoping to encourage the change are boosting communications efforts to ensure their voices are heard among the new-Congress clutter.

The Medicare Rights Center (MRC) is set to announce a joint initiative with several other unnamed advocacy groups. The initiative, noted MRC president Robert Hayes, will unite the public affairs efforts of the groups that are encouraging legislation that would force Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt to negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies.

“This will effectively take a truth squad approach,” Hayes said. “We’ll do both proactive and reactive outreach to not just the press, but other allied organizations. We’re anticipating a barrage of misleading propaganda from the pharma industry.”

Hayes said he expects to announce the details of the initiative, including which groups are involved, within the next week.

The Center for Medicare Advocacy (CMA) has also been preparing for the media storm that the debate will likely bring. Judith Stein, CMA’s executive director, said the organization has been reaching out to members of Congress, as well as sending e-mail alerts to the press. Stein said she is hoping to have an Op-Ed on the topic published soon.

The nonprofit is working with Douglas Gould & Co. on its communications efforts, which have included the creation of a Web site, fairmedicare.org, and regular podcasts from that site.

The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), the trade organization representing the major pharma companies, did not return calls seeking a comment on its communications plans.

In a statement following the election, however, the organization indicated that it would fight any proposal to change the current program. The government is currently specifically prohibited from negotiating drug prices.