

Brand funding works for Ten

AMANDA MEADE
TELEVISION

THE truth is, *It's a Knockout* didn't need to return to our screens last week with more than 1 million viewers to be a success for Network Ten.

Ten in effect bought the show for half-price — paying only a couple of hundred thousands dollars per episode — in a brand-funded deal with McDonald's.

Its appearance in prime time is believed to be a first in recent times for a program largely funded by a sponsor, a return to TV's earliest days when soap operas were actually paid for by companies such as Colgate-Palmolive.

Brand-funded content joins product placement, sponsorship and integration in showcasing brands for sponsors while helping networks foot production bills.

Last night, the second episode aired. The first knocked *60 Minutes* off its perch and won all the key demographics. A second



Team Maccas delivers a 'sublime' message on *It's a Knockout*

series was already in the pipeline, sources said.

"If this continues to rate as well as episode one it will be one of the most profitable shows on Ten," a source said.

It is a good deal for Ten. The network and McDonald's paid Fremantle Media to produce the show for them. But McDonald's also paid Ten a fee for the branding rights, and for the advertising slots that run in and around the

program. There are other brand-funded shows around — Huey's *Kitchen*, *New Idea Test Kitchen* and *Everyday Gourmet* with Justine Schofield to name a few — but none with such a high profile or screened in prime time.

It's a Knockout, a global franchise based on the French format Intercities, is the first collaboration between Ten and Fremantle Media Australia's new low

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Brand funding proves a knockout for Ten

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cost production arm Spring. FMA chief executive Ian Hogg said there would be many more such productions, particularly on multi-channels.

Many traditionally funded shows, such as Nine's *Celebrity Apprentice* and Ten's *MasterChef* are already packed with "integration" or segments featuring a client's products or services. *Apprentice* featured entire episodes filmed at KFC branches; while a *MasterChef* contestant has a hard time cooking anything without prominently using a Sunbeam kitchen appliance.

How does brand-funded content get more exposure?

"Brand-funded means the advertiser gives us cash to make the production and in return they're given branding rights," Mr Hogg said.

"It's a very credible way to fund a production if it's done in a subtle way. You can't have the hosts welcoming viewers and then stopping to drink a Diet Coke or whatever product it is. You can't use a sledgehammer. It

has to be sublime." Viewers might not associate sublime with *It's a Knockout*. Hosts H G Nelson, Brad McEwan and Charli Robinson do not refer to the McDonald's menu and there are no visits to McDonald's stores, but Team Maccas competes in the tournament and there are McDonald's banners around the stadium.

Making the production even cheaper for the network, it was filmed on a ready-made set in Malaysia.

The production company has editorial control. "We have editorial control but we are mindful of the advertiser's investments," Mr Hogg said.

Ten programmer Beverley McGarvey said *It's a Knockout* suited everyone's needs. "McDonald's was thinking about its own birthday campaign and the production company was just starting up," Ms McGarvey said. "The network wanted a program which was a good fit for summer."

McGarvey said the main difference between *Knockout* and *MasterChef* was that Ten paid for the production of *MasterChef* and then sought sponsors.