

MARKETING

[ROBIN HOOD STAGE PRODUCTION GOES ON WITH LIVE COMMERCIAL BREAKS]

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Ross Petty Productions is stealing from sponsors to give Torontonians a production of Robin Hood, part of Petty's annual holiday Pantomime series.

BMO Financial Group, Tim Horton's, Lowe's, Energizer, the Toronto Star and Le Meridien King Edward hotel are making a cameo appearance in two "commercial breaks" running in the first and second acts—three in each set.

The spots are parodies of existing brand ads and run for approximately 45 seconds.

Ross Petty, executive producer and one of the show's stars writes each ad, which is approved by the sponsor and features cast members.

Petty's productions have included product placement for 14 years, and video "commercials" since 2004. He said the audience has come to recognize and anticipate the sponsorship breaks.

"To my ears, the applause at the end of both those commercial sequences are all I need to know we've done a good job," he said.

The show would not survive without the help from sponsors, whose funds cover all of the pre-production costs, said Petty. He has no investment partners and, due to the economy this year, had to sign more sponsors than in years past.

Sponsors receive a mention in the show's nearly \$1 million marketing campaign, which includes print, radio, subway, online, and elevator board executions.

Petty negotiates the sponsorship deals himself, and usually invites marketing managers to the show in hopes of convincing them to participate in future productions.

The show runs for six weeks to approximately 70,000 people, he said.

Robin Hood is playing at Toronto's Elgin Theatre until Jan. 3.