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**INTERACTIVE** BY MIKE SHIELDS

## Time Inc. Turns On the TV

### Launches *SI* VOD channel and original video studio

**T**ime Inc. is looking less and less like a print company these days. Based on a pair of moves the company plans to announce this week, the venerable publisher is making an aggressive leap into both the TV business and original video production.

On Feb. 14, *Sports Illustrated* will launch *SI On Demand*, a new video-on-demand cable channel that will initially reach 7 million Time Warner Cable homes. The company will also unveil Time Inc. Studios, a new unit specifically tasked with producing video content for its multiple magazines to be used on the company's growing stable of TV and digital platforms.

"We've been putting an increased emphasis on digital," said John Squires, an executive vp with Time Inc. "The difference here is that we are being more aggressive in introducing video products. We are very focused on how we tell stories in a video format."

Squires said virtually all of the company's brands will begin tapping into the new studio for video content, whether it be for the Web or for other VOD launches. "Years ago, this would have cost us so much

more," he noted. "Now the barriers to entry are so much lower. We can compete with mainstream television."

Squires believes that more perishable broadband content, rather than VOD, will be the group's primary focus initially. "We have to understand more about what the video-on-demand marketplace wants. For service oriented magazines like *This Old House*, it's obvious. For news, it's more difficult."

To help figure all this out, the company recently hired Paul Speaker, a former independent film producer, to serve as president of the new studio. Speaker, who has previously headed RKO Pictures and once worked for the National Football League, said he's spent the last two-and-a-half months building out the group's facilities, which will include a pair of live-audience sound stages set to open later this year in Time Inc.'s New York and Birmingham, Ala., offices. Speaker said he got excited about taking his filmmaker's resume to a magazine company after chatting with *SI* group editor Terry McDonell, who showed him a collection of notebooks filled with ideas for TV. "The thing that is most compelling about Time Inc. is that it's so hard to find great storytellers and this place is full of them," said Speaker.

*SI On Demand* marks the magazine's return to the cable universe after the closure of CNN*SI*. Initially the channel will feature mostly pre-produced short clips—both from the making of the magazine's newest "Swimsuit" issue, which hits newsstands this week, to instructional videos from *Golf Magazine*. But down the road the *SI* will introduce original video produced by the new studio.

"We're using 'Swimsuit' to start us off. That's the Trojan horse," said Mark Ford, president and publisher of the *SI* Group. "The plan is to immediately begin integrating original sports video content."

Toyota has signed on as *SI On Demand*'s presenting sponsor, while men's body spray *Axe* is sponsoring the swimsuit clips as part of a multiplatform campaign. That's the way VOD will mostly be sold, said Ford. "It's really not advertisers going out and seeking VOD alone," he explained. "It's just another distribution channel. But we think we can compete with networks for ad dollars."

To do so, Speaker said that the flexible nature of his group will offer advertisers lots of creative, branded entertainment options. "We're able to be responsive to advertisers' needs," he said. "We draft, develop and produce with advertisers in mind." ■

**SI On Demand**

**SI Golf**

**SI Swimsuits**

For over 30 years Sports Illustrated's Swimsuit Issue has captured the attention of its readers. SI Swimsuit brings the best of SI Swimsuit to video.

TIME WARNER CABLE

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**The new VOD channel will launch on Time Warner systems with swimsuit clips Feb 14.**