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Absolut Initiative

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Full Sail students talk to cast during the filming of the 30-second Absolut spot.

"If they don't like it, if they don't buy it, we got to work on it. We got the experience to work on a professional commercial."

Khalid Mohtaseb

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Film students aim for a website or television spot for their ad

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To get work in film or any other entertainment field, it pays to have a creative, clever strategy. For emerging filmmakers, the huge popularity of Internet video (along with today's accessible, high quality equipment) creates the perfect sandbox for experimentation.

This opportunity is not lost on film students **Justin Murray**, **Khalid Mohtaseb** and **Freddie Stevens**, who put together a crew of about 25 people, \$2500 in investment money, and 17 actors and extras to create two commercials for Absolut on speculation.

The commercials are meant to market the new bottle of Absolut Pears that came out in February. "Right now currently, there's only one commercial for the Absolut Pears, and it's a 12-second spot. So hopefully we can get ours picked up for the 30-second spot," said Murray, the ad's writer and director.

The choice of the Absolute brand was deliberate: it so happens that another film student's father is senior vice president for marketing at Absolut. Murray discussed the idea with the student, and then set out to write the Absolut spots.

"How I approached it is I studied a lot of Absolut commercials and other vodka commercials too," said Murray. The film student's vision for the main commercial was to create a nightclub scene with an elegant and exotic feel that would appeal to an older crowd. The commercial has music composed and mastered by Recording Arts student **"Yung Chill,"** but no dialogue.

With their friend's family connection, the film students wrangled a telephone call with the marketing vice president and pitched their idea. "He loved it," said Mohtaseb, director of photography for the commercial.

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Mohtaseb said the students presented the commercial as a win-win situation. "If they don't like it, if they don't buy it, we got to work on it," said Mohtaseb. "We got the experience to work on a professional commercial."

This strategy is not exactly a new one for Mohtaseb. In Brooklyn, where he is from, he previously worked on commercials with art students from the Pratt Institute – one for Paper Denim jeans, one for Seagram's Ginger Ale, and several for Cadillac mountain bikes. The Seagram's ad, essentially a student project at Pratt, was picked up and broadcast on the company's website. The Cadillac spots were also featured on that company's site. "Interactive now is huge," said Mohtaseb. "Websites are bigger than television. [This kind of thing] does happen all the time."

Murray procured funding for the project from Orlando-based ShoLane Entertainment, a production company Murray has worked with for about a year and a half as a film editor.

Other Full Sailors were involved in the project as grips, gaffers and production assistants. Graduate Christopher Gravat was the main camera operator, and students from Digital Arts & Design and Computer Animation created the special effects for the bottle design and animation at the end of the commercial. These included **Matthew Damato** (Editor/Motion Graphic Artist), **Mark Schoenrock** (Modeling/Art Direction) and **Bryant Hardwick** (Textures).

(For a complete list of credits, see <http://www.murraymile.com/green.html>)

The two cuts the film crew created are for different markets – one for the American and one for the international market. "One tells the story backwards in more of an art form," said Murray. "I'm hoping that even if the spot doesn't get picked up for the American market, one of the two might fly for the international market."

Murray, Mohtaseb and Stevens all see a future for themselves in web commercials and music video filmmaking – at least as an entrée into the film industry.

"For being in our 20s [like] we are, commercial and music videos [are] where it's at," said Mohtaseb. "As a cinematographer, you're not going to be picked up to work on feature films straight out of film school. If you're going to get anything, it's going to be a commercial – a short, 30-second spot."

Peter Kantor, a lighting instructor who visited the set during the shoot, said he was impressed with the students' initiative and artistic direction. "It was nicely shot," said Kantor. "They definitely were operating like a professional crew."

- *Christine Baker*

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