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Time Warner Puts on Display In Effort to Fortify Cable Brand

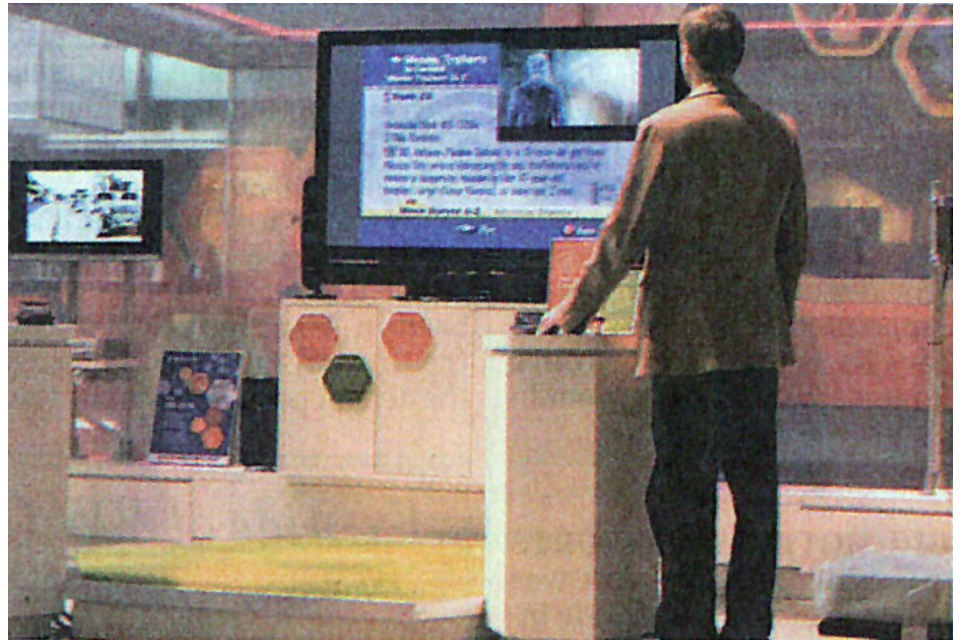
By MATTHEW KARNITSCHNIG

With a geographic monopoly and core product most Americans can't do without, Time Warner Inc.'s cable-TV division has never worried much about marketing.

But now, as it focuses on businesses that face much stiffer competition—such as telephone and high-speed Internet services—the company is scrambling to build a stronger brand to counter the telecommunications industry's savvy marketers.

As part of this effort, Time Warner this week opened an exhibit in its New York headquarters building where the public can sample the cable company's menu of services. After three weeks in New York, the interactive display—dubbed “Home to the Future”—will travel around the country to 12 cities where Time Warner Cable has operations, including Los Angeles and Dallas. Time Warner is also using the exhibit to present digital products from other parts of the media giant such as TMZ.com, a celebrity Web site operated by AOL and Warner Bros.

“If you just tell people about [our offerings] their eyes glaze over and they go back to their sandwich.” Said Time Warner Chief Executive Richard Parsons, who unveiled the project earlier this week. Though the installation's title may suggest something futuristic, most of what is on display—such as high-definition digital cable provided through set-top boxes, a cellphone that delivers live television and “Startover,” a video-on-demand technology that allows viewers to watch a program already in progress in its entirety—is



Time Warner hopes a new exhibit will win more customers.

already available or will be rolled out in the coming months.

But that is the point. As Time Warner Cable and other cable operators face new competition in their core business—delivering television signals—from telephone companies, they are trying to show that they can already supply a suite of services that will likely take their competitors years to replicate. In addition to the exhibit, Time Warner Cable is ramping up its ad spending across different media.

Giving consumers the chance to personally test a company's products through temporary exhibits is an increasingly popular marketing approach. Last month, for example, Procter & Gamble Co.'s Charmin brand sponsored 20 public toilets on New York's Times Square to promote its toilet tissue. The project was widely covered by the media, and photos and

videos of the toilets quickly spread on Internet sites such as YouTube.

Time Warner wants to create similar buzz with its Home to the Future display. Designed by Edwin Schlossberg, who created an interactive immigration-history project at Ellis Island in 2001, the exhibit is dominated by a four-story tower of translucent material in the building's lobby. At night, a colorful light show within the cube can be seen from blocks away. Mr. Schlossberg says he felt he needed a bold design for the project to grab and sustain people's interest.

Much of the exhibit consists of open rooms surrounding the cube, modeled on the different parts of a home where people watch television. Each room features several flat-screen televisions with demonstrations of Time Warner's offerings.