

Company Town On Location: Commercial shoots rebound in LA

Here's a commercial break to be happy about.

Commercial filming on the streets of LA is on the upswing, which hopefully might mean there is a thaw in the nationwide economy as advertisers show more willingness to spend money.

On-location shoots for commercials increased for the third consecutive week, according to FilmL.A.Inc., which handles film permits. Commercial filming generated 102 production days last week (defined as a single crew's permission to film at a project at a single location during a 24-hour period), nearly double the level from the same time a year ago (see chart).

The recession has taken a toll on commercial production, causing major advertisers like the Big Three automakers to scale back their spending on ads, meaning fewer opportunities for commercial filmmakers. Notwithstanding the recent spike in filming, on-location filming for commercials is still down 21% compared to the same time a year ago, according to FilmL.A.

"There's definitely more momentum," said Brian Carmody, executive producer of Smuggler, a production company that is filming a Nikon commercial this week with Ashton Kutcher in West Hollywood and **Beverly Hills**.

In addition to the Nikon shoot, Smuggler also is shooting commercials in the next week for Audi, AT&T, Kayak.com -- even the U.S. Postal Service.

To be sure, budgets are tighter than ever. Advertisers who previously might have been willing to spend \$500,000 on a two-day shoot, may limit their budget to \$400,000. But activity is definitely increasing, Carmody added.

"Advertisers are getting back on track," he said. "They are spending their way out of the recession."

-Richard Verrier