

Man Claims American Eagle and Clear Channel Stole His Billboard Idea

By DAREH GREGORIAN

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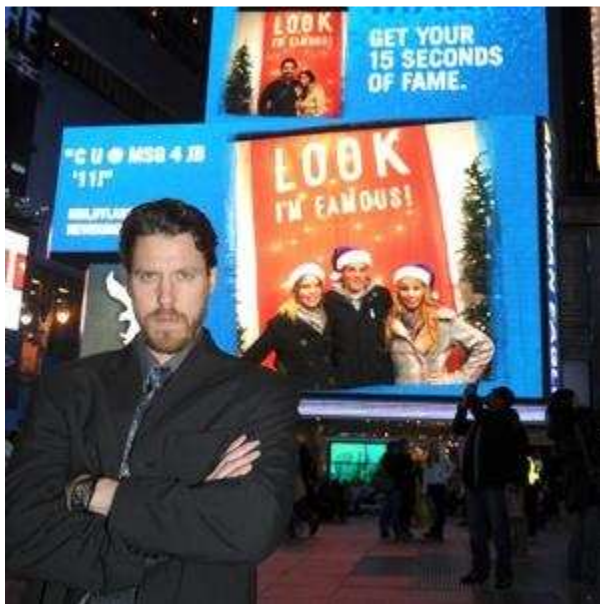
Holy Andy Warhol!

A Manhattan man says American Eagle Outfitters and Clear Channel ripped off his idea for a “15 Seconds of Fame” billboard in Times Square.

In papers filed in Manhattan Supreme Court, Jet Thomason says American Eagle announced its interactive billboard deal with business partners including Clear Channel soon after he’d met with Clear Channel about the very same idea.

“While the defendants say it’s pure coincidence, I don’t believe in coincidences,” said Thomason’s lawyer, Richard Roth. “Something smells in Times Square.”

Thomason, 32, a singer and actor, said he first came up with the idea of a billboard where people could post brief messages in 2003, “before electronic billboards were the thing.”



Helayne Seidman

AND YOU ARE? Jet Thomason says that after he pitched his “15 seconds of fame” video-billboard idea, it was stolen by two Times Square companies in cahoots.

A 2009 walk around Times Square then rekindled the idea.

“I was looking at all the tourists and thought what a great dream of theirs it would be to visit the greatest city in the world and have their faces up in the middle of Times Square,” he said.

He set up a company called “15 Seconds of Fame” — a tip of the hat to Warhol’s line that, “In the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes.” He came up with a business plan, which he took to Clear Channel in July 2009, after the company signed a confidentiality agreement.

“The concept of 15 Seconds is to allow virtually anyone to feature themselves on a digital billboard in Times Square for 15 seconds,” the suit says.

“Too much time can get long-winded; too little time would go unnoticed,” Thomason reasoned.

Thomason even picked out what he thought was the perfect spot, at 47th and Broadway.

The Clear Channel exec later e-mailed Thomason, “Love the ‘15 Seconds of Fame’ concept and hope we can make this happen,” the suit says. Thomason told him he was working on securing funding for the rental in August — so he was astonished when American Eagle announced that November that it was turning its billboard on the same block “into a ‘15 Seconds of Fame’ billboard.”

The suit says the similarities between the billboard and Thomason’s plan “are startling,” and “strong evidence” that American Eagle and Times Square billboard consortium partner Clear Channel were in cahoots.

It also notes that American Eagle announced the interactive billboard — which is available to people who buy goods at their flagship store on Broadway — at a time when Clear Channel was still bound by the confidentiality agreement with Thomason.

The suit seeks \$1 million from American Eagle and \$1 million from Clear Channel.

A rep for Clear Channel declined comment because of the pending litigation. A rep for American Eagle did not return a call for comment.

dareh.gregorian@nypost.com

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