



Coy ... Todd Sampson, left, and Russel Howcroft, right, with the compere, Wil Anderson.

Hard to place dollar value on fame

Nina Hendy

IN THE two years since *The Gruen Transfer* hit television screens, much has been written about the show's impact on the advertising industry. What is less clear is the impact the show is having on the bottom line of the two ad agencies most closely associated with the program.

The regular panellists Russel Howcroft and Todd Sampson are the heads of George Patterson Y&R and Leo Burnett respectively. Industry speculation suggests that both agencies have benefited from their chief executives being on the show. To what degree is hard to prove.

The pitch consultant Darren Woolley, of TrinityP3, said marketers pitching their advertising accounts were keen to discuss Howcroft and Sampson, and others requested they were added to the pitch list.

"The pair is far more high-profile in marketers' minds because of the television exposure they've had," Mr Woolley said. "I certainly get a lot more clients wanting to talk about Todd and Russel these days."

Late last year Leo Burnett won Chrysler's ad account, and Patts won the Just Car insurance account about the same time, both as a result of competitive pitches. Patts also recently retained the \$40 million Defence Force recruiting account and the related digital and website work.

But neither Howcroft nor Sampson would answer questions on the subject. Howcroft has always been coy about publicly linking any of his agency's success to his television appearances, and has refused to provide a list of account wins since he began on the program.

Sampson has also refused to reveal which accounts have landed since he became a TV star. "Our success comes from the 100 hard-working, talented people that work here - not me," he said in an email.

Mr Woolley said: "We ask marketers which agencies they would consider when they are pitching their advertising account. Most commonly, they have three ad agencies in their head - the agency they're with, the agency they used to be with and one other, which is usually the high-

profile agencies like Droga 5, Naked or Three Drunk Monkeys."

But, increasingly, Leo Burnett and Patts were sharing the limelight with these cutting-edge agencies, he said. "I put that down to *Gruen* so, yes, having their CEOs on television is a strategy that's definitely working for both agencies," Mr Woolley said.

However, a rival pitch consultant, Colin Wilson-Brown, said marketers were not asking for Sampson or Howcroft specifically. "I've only had one comment made about either of them from a client, who liked Todd after seeing him on *Gruen*," Mr Wilson-Brown said. "I was asked if we could include Leo Burnett on the pitch list but we couldn't because they had a conflicting account."

The pitch consultant Peter McDonald, of The Agency Register, said it was difficult to determine if either agency was picking up business as a result of the show. "Both agencies have also picked up their fair share of creative awards since the show began airing, so it's hard to determine if *Gruen* is the distinguishing element."