

Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

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Superbowl Commercials - The Bad & The Ugly - Lessons for Lawyers

Now that we've covered "[the good](#)" of the Superbowl commercials, let's talk about the bad and the ugly...and what can be learned from them.

We'll start with one of the more controversial series of spots...

Groupon

Save the Whales

This is the less tacky of the spots, though giving the idea that although it's nice to save the whales, it's better to save money is still missing the humor mark. But in the next spot...

Tibet

Some people seemed to think this one was funny, while others were offended. I tend not to be too thin-skinned, but I did agree that this was a mistake. I was surprised that after the [Kenneth Cole](#) debacle this week that they decided to go through with these spots, even considering the financial cost of them.

Now, Groupon did clarify the thought process behind the commercials with [this post](#). And while I think it's great that they suggest people donate money to the causes they were parodying, the spots were still a tasteless mistake. The lesson here is that humor is something you have to be careful with - what one person might find funny, a lot of others might not. You've got to know and understand your audience.

Secondarily, I'm not sure how well the ads actually reinforce Groupon's product. I'm a big fan of Groupon, but I've had a lot of trouble describing to friends and family what they're all about. I don't think I'm the only one. Their commercials could have broken that down a bit better. I think they were a fail all around.

For a great explanation that delves into this a bit further, check out Liz Strauss' post "[Groupon Super Bowl Ad: When Being Clever Offends and How to Win One for Tibet](#)"

Coca-Cola:

I was so disappointed with the two Coke ads - while I am a Pepsi girl at heart, I do drink an occasional Coke, and their ads are usually excellent.

Here are the two spots:

Siege

This commercial confused me - yes, there was a Coke in the commercial. But when the dragon drank it, the offense fell apart. So, is that a good thing? What does this siege have to do with Coke? Someone at the Superbowl party I was attending said "So, Coke kills dragons?" Fail.

Border Guards:

This spot was a bit more clever, but still confusing. Which border were they guarding? Who was watching them? Why did they even want a Coke? How did it make their lives better? All these commercials said to me was that Coke is confused about what they want to communicate about their brand.

E*Trade Baby

Let me preface this by saying that I have always LOVED the E*Trade baby commercials. They're memorable, BRILLIANT, and adorable. And the subtle message is that E*Trade is so easy a child could do it. But the Superbowl E*Trade ad was really disappointing.

I understand that the original baby has obviously grown up and is too old to appear in the commercials anymore. But this replacement baby is too different-looking for me, which is an immediate distraction from the purpose of the commercial. With all the technology we have today, I couldn't help but wonder if E*Trade could use the images that they shot for the original commercials to put together new ones.

The other issue I had with this commercial was that I found it a bit creepy - not cute. At the end of the spot when the baby puts his hand on the tailor's face...it's a strange moment. I didn't think it was as well done as their other commercials, and because I focused on comparing them, and found it lacking, I think it did more damage to E*Trade than benefit.

Doritos - Best Part:

Now, I admit to chuckling at this commercial. However, the general consensus seems to be that it was a bit creepy. I'm sure we've all licked our fingers after eating Doritos, but I've honestly never thought about - or wanted to - lick someone else's fingers.

This introduced an "ick" factor that I think turned a lot of people off. Definitely NOT something you want your customers to be thinking about when they look at your product. If the next time I go to pick up a bag of Doritos, I picture someone else licking my fingers after I eat them, I might put the bag back. Not an effective commercial.

Again, it's about understanding what is funny to your audience.

Dis-honorable Mentions:

- Pretty much every beer commercial. With the exception of the [Bud Light dog sitter](#) commercial, the others were simply unremarkable. I normally look forward to the beer commercials as some of the most creative and smart spots in the entire grouping, but this time they really fell flat for me.
- [Snickers](#): As someone said on Twitter last night, Roseanne is no Betty White. It wasn't as tightly done as the first series of commercials.
- [Go Daddy](#): Perhaps I'm overly sensitive, but I think football is no longer just a man's game. Particularly the Superbowl, which has become more of a social event than a sporting one. So a commercial aimed at a teen

boy's libido seems ill-placed and offensive. I have a good sense of humor and a pretty thick skin, but I have always found their commercials in poor taste.

- [MINI's "Cram it in the boot."](#) I thought this commercial was unfortunate. I have been a long time MINI owner (from 2004-2010) and think they have a wonderful product. I particularly enjoyed that they took a unique view to marketing and didn't do any television advertising until recently. I can see how this ad is trying to emphasize the additional trunk space in the new model, but I thought it was another commercial in bad taste.

And even worse than these spots? The ones I can't remember at all - there were some ads that didn't catch our attention or didn't stick in my memory. They didn't do any favors for their brands.

What are the lessons here for lawyers?

- Understand your audience: Your idea of humor may not be someone else's. When in doubt, leave it out.
- If you've had great success with a marketing tactic in the past, and you want to repeat it, do it as well as or better than the first time. A number of the fails I mentioned here were failures only because I was mentally comparing them to their much better originals.
- Connect to your product: If you're marketing your services as an attorney, make sure you're clear about what you're communicating. Don't confuse your audience or they won't understand why or what they should purchase from you.
- Be memorable: As I mentioned in the first post, it's key to find a way to connect with your audience so that they'll remember you - but for *good* reasons, not because you're creepy or in bad taste!

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