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Super Bowl Commercials - The Good of 2016

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON FEBRUARY 10, 2016

On Monday, we discussed what I saw as [the “best” of this year’s crop of Super Bowl commercials](#) (which my sister tells me is two words – “Super Bowl”), and although the general consensus seemed to be that most of the commercials this year were mediocre, we did find some to love. A few people even privately asked me why other commercials weren’t included on that list (and they’re included on today’s), so there were more than those eight mentioned that hit as favorites.

Today, we’ll look at the ones that made my “good” list for 2016; surprisingly, there were more on here than I thought. I worked to narrow it down to five, with a few honorable mentions, and I had trouble knocking some off the list. So see what you ultimately think of this list, and whether there are some that you were fond of that I missed altogether.

Audi: Commander



Audi does several smart things here – they liken their car to a space ship, touching on many kids’ dreams to fly into space (Hey! You can do that just by driving our car! This former astronaut even thinks so!); and they tug at your heartstrings not once, but twice – first by having the son make his father feel like a young space commander again, at the helm of his space ship, and again by playing a David Bowie favorite, calling to mind the recently lost musician. I’m not even a fan of David Bowie, and this commercial choked me up.

Why does this stay in my good, but not great, list then? Well, it’s a little gimmicky, as a friend pointed out. It’s an obvious ploy to use the nod to Bowie – it’s works, but it’s obvious.

What can lawyers and law firms learn?

- Playing on emotions can be effective: We see again and again in the effective ads that storytelling and connecting with people is what works. You don’t have to buy expensive Super Bowl advertising (or any advertising) to tell your story in a way that connects with people. Figure out what means something to your audience, and give that to them.

#AvosInSpace



Avocados from Mexico have done some great ads in the past few years, and this year's spot was no exception. They take a futuristic look back on some of the things that are popular today, suggesting that the Rubik's cube is something that our brains are too "simple" to solve, the "white/gold" dress started a civil war, that airplane seats are actually a torture device (they are), and randomly throwing in a preserved Scott Baio. In among all of that are the ever fresh avocados, ready to eat as guacamole, which the aliens love so much that they won't even feed Scott Baio any.

I can't give it top billing because it's only at the last moment that you know what it's an ad for, but it is clever and memorable.

Lessons for lawyers and law firms:

- Don't be afraid to poke fun at yourselves: The "aliens" look at the things that are part of popular culture like emojis and the dress of debatable colors and point out how ridiculous they are. I'd love to see firms/lawyers do that within their own practice areas, or even just within the legal industry. We're notorious for being behind the times when it comes to technology and adaptability, so why not have a little fun at your own expense? It's certainly attention getting. Just make sure that you're walking the line of good taste (which this ad does manage to do) and that you're continuously marketing your service throughout.

Budweiser: #GiveADamn



I applaud Budweiser for their efforts here. They're taking an important issue that's tangential to (and yet incredibly entwined with) their product and running an entire ad around it, much like Colgate did. Yes, they have their product visible throughout the ad, so you're in no doubt that it's a Budweiser commercial. But you're also left with no doubt as to how they feel about drunk driving – it's terrible, and you shouldn't do it.

However, there are two big misses here for me:

- The timing: I've long said that people who drink and drive don't decide to do it at the point at which they pick up their keys and get in the car. Once you start drinking, your judgment is automatically impaired, and there will be times that you're not getting pulled over, or into an accident, but you may arrive home and think "whoa, I probably shouldn't have driven here." Alcohol tells you that you're fine to drive, when you aren't. It's not that having even one drink impairs you; that's not what I'm saying. But it's dependent on a number of factors, and the only way to ensure that you're not going to drink and drive is to make arrangement **before** you start drinking for someone else to drive you. So by the time this ad was run in the third (or fourth) quarter, people were well into their Super Bowl drinking. Not only were they probably not really watching the commercials by that point, but it was really too late to make the decisions about whether they were going to drink and drive home. Had Budweiser run this commercial right at the beginning of the game, I'd give it a much higher rating, but running it when people were already well into their drinking for the evening is just too big of a miss for me.
- The audience: I love Helen Mirren. I think she's amazing and awesome and pretty hot stuff. I also think the majority of Budweiser drinkers, and yes, I'm stereotyping here, probably have no idea who she is. They're going to wonder why some English lady, hot though she may be, is telling them that they're jerks for drinking and driving. If Budweiser is going to spend Helen Mirren money for an actress to pass along the "don't drink and drive" message, then I would have liked to

have seen them find someone that would really catch the attention of the people that drink their beer. My sense is that your average Bud-drinking, Super Bowl watching, possible drunk-driver that is supposedly the target of this commercial is not going to be fangirling over Helen Mirren.

Those two things being said, the commercial DOES have some great lessons for lawyers and law firms:

- Know your audience: I know this is a lesson we take away every year from these Super Bowl commercials, and that's because it's a valuable one. Any marketing you do, in any form, is only successful when you know who you are targeting and what they want. It's possible that Budweiser is actually going after a more sophisticated group here, and that's why they brought in Dame Mirren (who, as someone pointed out, likely doesn't drink Budweiser herself), and if that's the case, then good on them. If you're starting a new practice area, attracting different clients, targeting the same clients – develop your target personas and understand who they are, what is important to them and then deliver that.
- Get your timing right: We'll talk more about this with the bad and the ugly ads that ran during the game, but timing is really everything, with marketing as well as in life. You may be reaching the right people with the right message, but are you reaching them at the right time?
- Budweiser is still doing a lot right in this ad. It's beautifully shot, with a simple, straightforward, and bold message. We need more of that. Don't be shy to talk about the things that may be “negatives” to your business, but that you can take a strong stand on and show some leadership with. It seems taboo that a beer company should talk about drunk driving, but they don't want people to die or end up in jail either. Are there things in your practice that you could pull back the covers on and talk about too? Even if you're not comfortable with being so bold, take a cue from Budweiser with simple, straightforward marketing. We know they spent a lot of money on it, but it's direct, it's refreshing, and it's smart. Do more of that.

The Bud Light



What's not to love about this ad? At this point in the election cycle here in the US, we're already experiencing voter fatigue, and we've barely gotten started. Seth Rogen and Amy Schumer get it right – while it seems these days that most people are sitting around disagreeing with each other on most everything (just look at Facebook for a few minutes), maybe there are some things we can agree. It probably IS safe to say that we all like Paul Rudd, and who doesn't feel inspired after hearing a few words from Independence Day? It's a really funny, tongue-in-cheek spot that reads the temperature of the nation at the perfect time.

The miss for me is a personal one, and that's two-fold, one that I don't drink, and even if I did, I wouldn't drink Bud Light. So while some things are uniting, I doubt that drinking Bud Light would be – but A+ for effort, Bud Light! If it was an ad for chocolate on the other hand...

That being said, the lessons for lawyers and law firms:

- Look to unite: Particularly at this time, in the US, we're a very divided place. Everyone has their issues, and their VERY strong opinions on those issues. This commercial, without separating people into one party or another, manages to find the very limited list of things people can probably agree on – Paul Rudd, the word “caucus” sounding funny, and wishing we could find more to agree on. If you're a regular Zen reader, you know already that I always recommend against talking about hot topics like politics (unless that's specifically something that your firm is specialized in, and even then, there's a WAY to do it). But in your marketing, can you be a uniting force? Are there things that you can find in your community to bring people together on and find agreement over? It doesn't have to go in the direction of this ad, and by that, I mean that you don't have to say something like “Hey, we're all tired of politics, so let's look at what we DO agree on.” But find common ground in other areas, and use that as a means for discussion, sourcing

new ideas, etc.

The Chase: Hyundai

The Chase – Hyundai Super Bowl Commercial | T...  



This was the first commercial of the Super Bowl that I saw, and I still chuckle over it. Hyundai did a lot of good work this Super Bowl season, and this one is no exception. They use a clever way to illustrate a new feature of their car – the ability to remote-start the car by using your smart watch. But what makes it for me is the bears’ conversation – had it been only one bear saying he wanted to give them a hug, and acting misunderstood, I would have been disappointed. But the second bear saying “Oh, I was going to eat them,” as is his nature, and the first bear replying “I thought you were vegan?” with the reply “It’s my cheat day,” just cracked me up. Really funny stuff.

It’s a bit silly, and nothing groundbreaking (other than the ability for you to REMOTE START YOUR CAR WITH YOUR SMART WATCH), which is why it doesn’t make it into my “great” list, but it’s a good commercial, and it’s funny.

Lessons for lawyers?

- Finish your marketing to the end: Sometimes, marketing can feel incomplete – that would have been the case if the ad had ended with the first bear saying “I was just going to give them a hug.” While it would have been a cute, solid ad, still communicating the message about Hyundai’s remote start, it wouldn’t have gone as far as it needed to, and as it ultimately did. This can happen with marketing (and with business development, for that matter). We put together a campaign, but it’s missing a piece – like we have a beautiful new website, but the mobile site isn’t working effectively; or we make a big announcement and launch a campaign, but we forget about the social media side of things entirely. Both the messaging, and the tactics, need to be a full and complete

process for the marketing to be effective, and that includes goals, strategy, research, execution, measurement and evaluation. It can't just be about one piece of the idea.

- Never be afraid to be funny and clever: I know I say this every year too, but it's also true every year. Yes, the law is a serious profession, in which people have serious issues. It's easier to make beer and cars and movies fun and silly in television commercials. But I know many very funny lawyers, who are also brilliant jurists. Being funny and being smart are not mutually exclusive, and there are ways to marry the two in your marketing. So while it may not work for every firm or every firm's culture, I still long for more risk-taking lawyers and law firms to engage in some humorous marketing campaigns that take advantage of the comedians I know they're hiding inside.

Honorable Mentions

- Wix.com: Normally, I wouldn't mention a commercial that combines SO many different things, but I have a soft spot for this one, because I think many legal marketers can relate. How many of us have had a partner come into our offices saying "We need an ad to get more business!" Wix uses Kung Fu Panda to illustrate some of the top ads from over the years (remember the croaking frogs for Budweiser, or the Old Spice guy – those were the days of good advertisements!) and it ends with the idea that instead of starting with spending a ton of money on an expensive ad, you start with a strong website (which at wix.com is free, apparently). It's cute, it's funny, it's a bit gimmicky, but I like it, so it gets an honorable mention from me.
- Death Wish Coffee Company: I cannot tell you how much I love that a big company like Intuit Quick Books took a small business, with NO chance of affording a Super Bowl commercial, and gave them the opportunity to have their own ad. I. Love. It. Law firms – you can do this for your clients. It doesn't have to be advertising, but use your leverage to showcase your client's successes and triumphs whenever you can. It is one of the best, and fastest, ways to build client loyalty.
- Axe: Find Your Magic: Another great spot I wish more people were talking about (unfortunately, it's just not that memorable for some reason, and that's why it only gets honorable mention). It's got a great message though – embrace the thing that is "you" and it will draw people to you. Lawyers, law firms: that's the message for you, too.
- #Pokemon20: Wow, did I want this commercial to be for something else. It was one of the most inspiring ads of the night, but then it turned out to be for Pokemon – a let down. But take some lessons from this – showcase drive, determination, inspiration, boldness – those are characteristics that a lot of lawyers have, and there are ways to highlight them in your marketing.

