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Super Bowl Commercials - The Ugly of 2017

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON FEBRUARY 14, 2017

We are finally here at the “ugly” of the 2017 Super Bowl commercials – do you already have your list in mind? The first couple were really easy for me to come up with, and the last few were late additions after some extra thought was given to the crop of ads this year.

No need for extreme measures just Switch to Sprint!

No need for extreme measures just Switch to Spr...



Sprint, seriously?

The best that you could come up with after spending all of that money on this spot was the idea to fake your own death to get out of your phone contract?

Seriously icky and disturbing.

And while his family watches no less? Really? Just a no, all around.

We get it. You want to give us the message that it's hard to get out of your phone contract. But is that really the reason you should switch to Sprint? Because it's so hard to get out of your phone contract that you need to fake your own death? That's the best you have to offer us?

Huh.

What are the lessons for lawyers and law firms?

- Have a solid sales proposition. We've talked about this a bit ad nauseum, but what is the problem that you solve for your clients? Yes, Sprint is attempting to illustrate that here, but how could they have better shown the positive features that they offer their users? The things that you WANT from a mobile phone company, instead of just the things you don't want from your existing company? If the only thing that you're offering your clients is that you don't do the annoying thing that your competitors do, then eventually your competitors will catch on and just stop doing that thing. What will you offer then? Instead, show your clients and potential clients the value that you add to their lives because they have hired you. What are the positive things that they gain as purchasers of your services?
- Don't be icky. The above also touches on this point. While pointing out your competition's foibles can be effective, at some point, it's only going to highlight your own weaknesses. Use your messaging to show your practice and firm strengths instead of picking out what the other guy does wrong. Associate positive solutions and feelings with working with you and clients will see you as smart, solution-oriented, business-minded, etc. instead of nitpicking what other people aren't doing right.

Mr. Clean | New Super Bowl Ad | Cleaner of Your Dreams

Mr. Clean | New Super Bowl Ad | Cleaner of Your ...



This ad got another “seriously?” from me. Because like the Sprint ad, it was icky.

First, when did Mr. Clean become this creepy cartoon? I know they’ve morphed him into this avatar over the past few ad campaigns, but I hate it more and more. Perhaps this could have been an effectively done commercial had they gone with an actual person over a computer-generated, over-sexed set of pixels, but I’m still on the fence about that.

What are the lessons for lawyers and law firms?

- I suppose it bears repeating, but don’t be icky. In this case, there are mixed messages: the ad is attempting to be clever by pointing out that women think a man who cleans is sexy, but the end up making it creepy and uncomfortable by “upgrading” Sara’s husband to this weird Mr. Clean cartoon. In our own marketing, there are two lessons there – the first is to avoid confusion with our messaging. What is it that we want to communicate to people about what we do and offer? And secondly, sometimes jokes that seem funny end up being off-putting. Just...try not to make those jokes in professional company. If you’re not sure how a joke will land, skip it. You can always tell a joke or a story later, but you can never take it back. I really wish Mr. Clean could take this whole ad back.
- Execution is everything. Ideas can be excellent, but unless you get every detail just right, you may miss landing the perfect project. This can apply to anything from a blog post to a presentation to a client pitch to an entire marketing campaign. Sometimes it’s worth slowing down to dot your i’s and cross your t’s to ensure that the execution matches the brilliance of the initial idea before you unveil it.

TurboTax 2017 Big Game Commercial “Humpty Hospital” (Official :45) TV ad – Humpty Dumpty Commercial

TurboTax 2017 Big Game Commercial "Humpty H..



You may wonder why this one made it into the “ugly” list and not just the regular old “bad” list. I had it there first, and then when making my final lists, I happened to catch the preview ad that aired as a set up for this commercial, which propelled it right into ugly:

TurboTax 2017 Commercial "Humpty Fall" (Offici...



I'm sorry you had to see that.

It *might* have been forgivable if the spot was for insurance of some kind. But it's not – it's for taxes.

There is a tangential connection in the actual Super Bowl commercial, where Humpty uses his phone to speak with a TurboTax representative about whether or not his recent medical expenses are deductible (spoiler alert: they are). But otherwise, the tie-in with TurboTax is slim.

What are the lessons for lawyers and law firms?

- Don't make your audience do the work. In the above ad, TurboTax asks us to make a huge flying leap between Humpty Dumpty's fall and taxes. Huge. There's absolutely no correlation – they try to draw one, but it's really quite vague. Don't do the same to your audience – the harder you make them work, the less likely they are to do it. We often think that our audience will *want* to make certain connections, or they will want to come to certain conclusions on their own. And in our industry, we are dealing with very intelligent people who are absolutely capable of drawing necessary parallels. But we're also dealing with busy people. So I'm telling you right now, if you insist on making people work to figure out what you're trying to tell them in your content, with your marketing, in your service delivery promises, etc. they are just not going to bother. They'll move on to someone else who is being more direct because they don't have the time to do the work.
- Leverage the cool stuff. TurboTax has this cool app that allows you to talk right to a tax specialist about your taxes (no, that doesn't make them unique, but they're among the unique tax prep software companies to offer it). Why not focus on that as a selling point? We all have strengths

in our practices and firms and instead of trying too hard to be clever, sometimes it's better to leverage those strengths and showcase the heck out of them. TurboTax could have come up with a list of funny queries that people have to illustrate that they have this robust app that is here for you, but instead, they want you to feel like you're Humpty Dumpty, the idiot who was doing their taxes on top of a wall.

- Don't compare your audience to idiots. TurboTax wants us to put ourselves in the shoes of the end user of this app – in this case, Humpty Dumpty. So we're supposed to be totally cracked, foolishly doing our taxes on top of a wall, because we can? All I can see is yolk leaking out of his face. Which reminds me again – don't be icky. Fortunately, while I don't see many law firms or lawyers presuming their intended audiences are stupid, this is your regularly scheduled reminder to continue to focus on who your audience is, ensure that you're using the language that they use in your messaging (from top to bottom), and that you periodically bring in members of that audience to review what you're saying, how you're saying it, and where you're saying it, so that you are being as effective as possible.

Skittles | “Romance” | Super Bowl LI Commercial

Skittles | "Romance" | Super Bowl LI Commercial



Some people loved this commercial, but alas, I was not one of them – this ad is proof positive that a little repetition can go the wrong way.

Had Skittles simply removed the constant “Katie. Katie. Katie. Katie. Katie.” from the spot, I probably would have thought it was cute. But instead, it drove me crazy.

What are the lessons for lawyers and law firms?

- Sometimes too much is...too much. We've talked here on Zen before about being the signal in the noise. There's SO much information out there these days that it's hard to rise above all of the nonsense to be heard. The temptation can be to yell louder and louder or just to repeat yourself

until someone hears what you're saying. But is this *really* effective? Statistics are showing that it's not. The saying "less is more" is starting to really mean something again. What does that mean for you? Get as focused as possible – find out where your audience is, and be there. You don't have to be on all social media platforms, attend all networking events, present at all conferences, share everything everywhere. Figure out what makes the most sense for you based on your goals, and pursue those channels with your specific message.

It reminds me of a lawyer that we used to have in our Network. He was an older gentleman (now retired) and he very rarely spoke in large group conversations. But when he did, everyone shut up and listened, because what he said was always extremely intelligent and valuable. There are others who constantly interrupt and are always sharing their opinion. People value their words less, because they hear them constantly. They're more the noise than the signal. The former lawyer was always the signal in the noise.

Now that you've heard my hits and misses for this year's crop of commercials, what were your favorite spot? Which ads did you hate, or just find lukewarm? What lessons have you picked up for your practice?