

## **Superbowl Advertising Review: 2006**

Tim Calkins  
Clinical Associate Professor  
Kellogg School of Management  
t-calkins@kellogg.northwestern.edu

There is nothing quite like the Superbowl, at least when it comes to advertising. No other venue gets so much attention and focus. This is as it should be; with more than 90 million viewers and a \$2.5 million price tag for a 30 second spot the Superbowl is clearly the #1 advertising opportunity in the world today.

Reviewing Superbowl advertising is a valuable exercise; it provides learnings about advertising and communication that are broadly applicable. Once again this year I assembled a panel of marketing students from the Kellogg School of Management to review all the advertising. The thirty-five students were all marketing majors and members of the marketing club. The students reviewed each ad, with a focus on evaluating how well the spot worked to build the business and the brand.

The panel focused on four things. First, attention: does the spot break-through and grab your attention? Second, branding: is it clear who is advertising? Is the brand integral to the ad? Third, benefits: is the benefit clear? Is it compelling? Ultimately advertising has to drive sales, and sales come from benefits. Fourth, likability: is the spot enjoyable? Advertising studies suggest that ads people like have a greater impact on sales than ads people don't like, which of course makes intuitive sense.

What follows are the best of the 2006 Superbowl advertisers, along with the runner-ups and then the worst advertisers.

## **The Best: A**

### 1. Dove

Dove was the top advertiser at this year's Superbowl, as rated by the Kellogg panel. This is a surprise. The spot is by no means a typical Superbowl commercial, because it has a very high order benefit, focusing on the images our society sends to girls and what that does to their self-esteem. The power in this ad is that it differentiates Dove in an emotional, important way; Dove is a unique voice in the world of beauty and personal care products. There is no obvious product benefit here, but the ad builds the brand just the same.

The Dove ad worked particularly well because it targeted, primarily, women, and women make up a large part of the Superbowl audience. At the same time, the spot resonated with men; by focusing on girls the spot connected with fathers in a powerful way.

### 2. Budweiser and Bud Light

Budweiser has long purchased more time on the Superbowl than any other advertiser. This year, the company ran a total of 10 spots, with the majority for Budweiser and Bud Light. Remarkably, all of the spots for Budweiser and Bud Light worked well; the branding was strong, the spots were likable and they broke through the clutter. If there is a formula to Superbowl advertising, then the folks down in St. Louis have it.

The Magic Fridge spot for Bud Light was the top rated ad of the entire Superbowl. This ad was exceptionally funny and communicated the product benefit with excellent branding.

### 3. Michelob

Michelob ran one of the more powerful spots on the Superbowl, communicating the new Michelob Ultra Dark product. The spot was very clear on the situation; a light beer gone dark. This spot attracted attention, was well branded and clearly delivered a benefit. It was a bit violent, but in a good natured way, to the extent that is possible. It built on the legacy of Reebok's famous Terry Tate spot from the 2004 Superbowl.

### 3. Career Builder

Career Builder ran two funny, entertaining and powerful spots featuring the chimps. This is the second year Career Builder has run chimps ads at the Superbowl, and, again, the spots worked well.

In 2005, Career Builder received a B, because the differentiating message about Career Builder was absent; the benefit the simply a category benefit: get a new job. This year, the Career Builder team boosted up communication of “most jobs” and as a result the spots worked harder, earning a well deserved A.

### 4. Diet Pepsi

Diet Pepsi ran two commercials on the Superbowl, each featuring the Diet Pepsi can with its agent. These spots were well branded, attention-getting and contemporary, which is why they received an A rating. The spots didn't have the charm of last year's Diet Pepsi spot, but worked hard nonetheless.

### 5. Mastercard

Mastercard ran one spot, another installment of the powerful “priceless” campaign. This spot communicated that Mastercard can be used for everyday purchases. The spot was entertaining, attention getting and product focused.

Mastercard has wisely resisted the temptation to change campaigns in an effort to break-through. This is a creative challenge, but strengthens the effort substantially; a viewer knows the basic story, the message and the brand early in the ad without having to be told.

## **The Runner Ups: B**

### 1. Fed Ex

The Fed Ex spot, featuring cavemen, was clever and product focused. The message was clear and back on the classic Fed Ex positioning; people don't get fired when they use Fed Ex. The spot didn't score an A because it just didn't have the charm of some of the A spots. This is part of what makes advertising difficult and sometimes frustrating.

### 2. Ford

Ford did a nice job communicating the primary benefit for the Ford Hybrid SUV: it makes it easy to be green. The company utilized Kermit, a likeable, environmentally friendly and green figure if there ever was one, and highlighted the fact that by driving Ford's Hybrid SUV you can feel good about yourself for being environmentally sensitive.

It is interesting to contrast the successful Ford ad with the very weak spot by Toyota for its hybrid car. In that spot, which ran in a coveted early position in the Superbowl, a father and his son discussed the merits of the hybrid technology. The overall message was that driving a hybrid is "good for the future." The only problem is that good for the future is not exactly a compelling benefit; in our immediate gratification society people want benefits right now. As a result, the Ford spot works much harder.

This is all a bit ironic, of course, because the idea that one can drive a big SUV and feel environmentally superior is absurd. A person concerned about the environment should walk, or take the train, or if it is absolutely necessary to drive, buy a small hybrid car. SUVs are rarely an essential part of life. Still, factual truth and marketing are two important but often unrelated things, so the Ford spot works.

### 3. Disney

One of the most charming spots this year was for Disney, featuring various football players practicing saying "I'm going to Disneyworld." This was a charming, funny spot, perhaps a

future Superbowl classic. The other spot from Disney was less powerful, which is why Disney received a B grade overall.

#### 4. Sharpie

The Sharpie spot delivered on all the elements of a Superbowl spot. It was attention getting and well branded, it delivered a benefit and it was highly likable.

The only big issue is that the big news, a retractable pen, is not exactly earth shattering innovation. Still, for Sharpie it is news, and this makes the spot work.

#### 5. Sprint

Sprint ran two spots during the Superbowl and both spots worked well. The first featured two men discussing phone features in a locker room, and ended with one fellow throwing his phone at the other, highlighting the phone's potential as a self defense device. The second spot showed a man downloading music.

Both commercials were unexpected and highlighted benefits, and this is why they worked well. The first spot, in particular, was a bit disturbing; throwing a cell phone at someone's face is violent behavior, and I thought the many benefits listed distracted from the overall message. The second spot was more focused on powerful.

## **The Misses: F**

### 1. Nationwide

Nationwide was the lowest scoring advertiser on the Superbowl this year, according to the Kellogg panel. The Nationwide spot featured Fabio as a gondolier, in what appeared to be a shampoo commercial. Later in the spot Fabio turns into an old fellow, highlighting the speed with which time goes by.

The problems here are profound and numerous. The biggest issue is that there is no benefit, no reason why someone should use Nationwide. Someone may get from the spot that there is a need to plan financially for the future (I don't think so, but lets just assume), but even so there is no reason why one should work with Nationwide instead of all the other options. Other issues include the lack of strong branding, a slow start (which hurt attention) and low likability.

Life comes at you fast, indeed, but Nationwide should have spent a bit more time on this one.

### 2. Emerald Nuts

Emerald Nuts was one of the hits of the 2005 Superbowl. This small brand ran an ad that was somewhat twisted, but certainly got attention and delivered a benefit. As a result, Emerald got an A last year.

This year Emerald missed. The spot, featuring a completely random collection of characters including droid and a machete enthusiast, made very little sense. It was, if anything, disturbing. Most importantly, the spot completely failed to deliver a benefit about Emerald Nuts, the first and most basic role of a piece of advertising.

Emerald's change in fortune highlights how difficult it is to do great Superbowl advertising; after a great effort in 2005 the same brand missed completely in 2006.

### 3. Fidelity

Fidelity ran a lovely spot about Paul McCartney. Unfortunately, the spot was 98% Paul McCartney, and about 2% Fidelity. Missing from the spot was branding and, even more importantly, a benefit. Why should someone use Fidelity?

#### 4. Motorola

Expectations were high for Motorola heading into the Superbowl, because the company was featuring its newest phone, the pebble. This phone follows the very successful razor phone, which has propelled Motorola forward.

Motorola's spot was epic, with shots of asteroids crashing into the earth and glaciers carving the earth into pieces. Unfortunately, after an enormous build-up, the pay off was a completely let-down: a phone that looks like, well, a phone. It was not clear at all how the phone is different from any of the others currently on the market. It looks a lot like the phone I'm carrying right now, a phone that one did not require glaciers and asteroids.

With a huge build-up and little payoff you get, well, a disappointment. And that is what this spot was.

#### 5. Go Daddy

Go Daddy is back on the list of Superbowl clunkers this year. In 2005, this small dot com ran a spot that pushed the limits of good taste, and in the process attracted a lot of attention and, according to the company, business. For this reason, some critics loved the 2005 effort. The 2005 Kellogg panel gave the spot a D, however, because the commercial failed to communicate a benefit.

This year Go Daddy missed again. The spot was well branded, but failed to break-through. It seems that the company got so excited about the Superbowl, and its 2005 ad, that it lost all perspective. The 2006 ad is at best an inside joke for those following the 2005 controversy. Unfortunately, most people don't really care about the 2005 ad or Go Daddy.

## **Other Notable Advertisers**

-Cadillac: This spot had you on the edge of your seat wondering where it was going. From the dark, swirling water emerges a model, dripping and mysterious. And then, rising up with much anticipation is, well, an SUV. Just like all the other SUVs in the world. Why this one needed to emerge from the water in such a peculiar way was very unclear.

-Hummer: This was a very big spot. Two monsters get together and produce a Hummer H3, a "little monster." This was also a very strange spot, and a somewhat disturbing spot. As one person on the Kellogg panel wrote, "The idea of a monster giving birth to a Hummer is not appealing." Well said.

-Sierra Mist: One of the funniest spots on the Superbowl. It was clever, funny and appealing. The Kellogg panel gave it a C, but I think it should have received a higher grade.

-Burger King: You have to give Burger King credit for going all out on production values. This was a big, lavish spot, with a bit of humor and an over the top feel. It was all a little much, however, so the spot wasn't that likable and the core message of "Have It Your Way" got lost. Still, credit to Burger King for getting back to the powerful old tag line, and for investing in the effort.

-Ameriquest: I didn't entirely understand Ameriquest's ads in the last Superbowl. What was the point? Is one supposed to call Ameriquest for a mortgage? Or ask for an Ameriquest mortgage from a mortgage broker? Is the company for people with bad credit scores? Does Ameriquest make bad loans?

This year I was lost again. Once more, Ameriquest ran two extremely funny spots, the best featuring a doctor commenting "I think we killed him."

-PS: This company ran one spot with a message that just doesn't differentiate: disinfecting. Virtually all cleaning products these days disinfect, so how this makes PS unique is not at all clear to me. Perhaps PS is using the fact that it advertised on the Superbowl to build distribution with retailers. This might actually work, but the company will need something far more compelling to say to have any hope of surviving in the crowded, clutter world of home cleaners.

-Westin: This ad, announcing that Westin is now a non-smoking hotel chain, was a snoozer indeed. I suppose being a snoozer isn't a bad thing for a hotel chain, but on the Superbowl it isn't enough.