

instincts

Instincts is a monthly publication on branding for clients, associates and friends.

Leading and inspiring all those who touch the enterprise
to understand, embrace and enhance the power of your brand.

Super Bowl ads: One More Fumble

Branding is a process, not an event. Not even at an event like the Super Bowl!



Every year in the run-up to Super Bowl, there is more hype about the ads than there is about the game: cost per 30 seconds (this year topping \$3 million), who's in, who's out and stories about great ads of the past (like the Apple vs. IBM classic). And of course, pity the poor Canadians, fighting to find a Super Bowl Party with access to American programming and commercials so as not to miss this marvelous mini-film festival. (Then there's anticipation of wardrobe malfunctions...congrats, Prince, for keeping your pants on).

While Super Bowl ads are wonderfully entertaining half-minute movies, they are, for the most part, **not** Brand builders – because all the excitement puts the participating marketers under pressure to go *off-Brand*. The exorbitant, all-or-nothing cost has them questioning their own sanity (*should we be spending this much to send out the same old message?*) and their strategy (*surely this one-shot cost, in this high-creative environment, deserves something new and special!*). And their creative partners, the guys who actually create these Super-commercials, are desperate to use this once-in-a-career opportunity to try something "revolutionary" and build their own reputations.

And so, in a world where strong Brands are built with consistency of message and consistency over time, Super Bowl brings out the worst in Brand discipline, with negative results to match. A few years back, Budweiser ran their attention-getting "wassup?" campaign only to see sales *drop* – with people saying "funny yah, but what's the premium-positioned *King of Beers* now doing with the street level *wassup?*"

What would the Brand Coach coach?

While very, very few marketers will ever come even close to using the Super Bowl, they will all have moments of temptation. Temptation to do something out of their Brand's character for a special occasion. Temptation to say something different because their competitors are. And temptation to change what they stand for just because they are bored and assume everyone else is.

Don't you do it!

Customers of all kinds love "their" Brands – because in a world of hyper-choice and hyper-messaging, their Brands are the only constant. Brands today are tools of self-defense – they allow trusting customers to ignore the advertising of competitive products and save brainspace for other, more important things. But when marketers change the message, they risk losing the trust of customers – and the customers themselves.

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