

Super Bowl Preview: Big Game Marked By Uncharacteristic Ad Controversy

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New Orleans Saints, Indianapolis Colts Aren't Only Ones At Odds; A Rundown Of Spots--And Directors--Slated For Super Sunday

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The Super Bowl is traditionally a feel-good story from an advertising perspective--record prices paid from one year to the next for :30 time slots, underscoring the premium attached to being able to garner a mega-audience in an otherwise fragmented landscape; and a field of spots that is generally marked by or that at least aspire to high entertainment value, often tickling the funny bone.

However, for the first time in many years, the average cost for 30 seconds of air time has decreased-- from \$3 million on NBC in 2009 to somewhere between \$2.5 million and \$2.8 million this year on CBS.

And at least during this pre-game juncture, an uncharacteristic measure of controversy has been injected into the Big Game advertising discussion, primarily on two fronts.

For one, Chrysler--which recently emerged from bankruptcy and garnered government funding to stay afloat--has a :60 spot on tap promoting its Dodge Charger for Super Sunday. This has caused critics to question why the company would elect to spend big bucks on a single commercial. Some perceive this as a waste of taxpayer dollars. After all, GM has bowed out of the Big Game each of the last two years. Chrysler is the lone U.S. automaker slated at press time to advertise during the Super Bowl telecast.

On the flip side, if Chrysler is looking to spur on its recovery, what better place to make a big splash with consumers than on the Big Game? This in turn elicits the query as to whether potential consumer backlash over the Super Bowl buy negates any benefit that advertising during the game can generate.

The other source of controversy is CBS' decision to accept an advocacy ad from Christian group Focus on the Family. The :30 is expected to feature college football star Tim Tebow, recounting the story of his mom's pregnancy with him in 1987. After taking ill during a mission of mercy to the Philippines, she ignored a recommendation by doctors to abort her fifth child, who turned out to be Tim, a Heisman Trophy winner, the leader of a University of Florida team that won two national championships, and a stellar citizen involved in public service both in the U.S. and overseas.

Pro-Choice advocates have criticized the ad as anti-abortion and not appropriate for the Super Bowl.

However CBS has said that it has changed its stance on advocacy ads and will consider responsible messages for other causes to fill open slots during the Big Game. Back in 2004, CBS rejected an ad by the United Church of Christ welcoming gays to their community and places of worship. CBS said that with its new policy, such an ad would be accepted today.

Some view the new CBS policy as a sign of the economic times as networks scramble for revenue, causing them to now view quite differently advocacy advertising they once dismissed.

Lineup card

Per usual during the week-plus leading up to the Big Game in Miami on Feb. 7, many advertisers, agencies, production houses, post shops and other support services are reticent about their Super Bowl projects. In some cases, secrecy has been heightened as clients don't want to tip their ad strategies to the competition. Nonetheless, through the industry grapevine and other circuitous routes, *SHOOT* garnered details and a number of credits for some of what may very well emerge during the Super Bowl telecast.

Certainly some clients are wearing their ad plans on their figurative sleeve for all to see, with the consumer-created spot dynamic returning to the Super Bowl, with spots appearing online so that the public can vote on their favorites, helping to determine which one actually runs on air. Pepsico Frito-Lay's Doritos is again tapping into the consumer-generated arena. And for the first time, so too is CareerBuilders.com which has prospective user-conceived and produced commercials online for all to see as part of a Super Bowl contest. Among the candidates is "Casual Fridays" which introduces us to a workplace in which

employees are walking about in their underwear. When the boss announces that "Casual Fridays" will be expanded to a daily affair, the message emerges that perhaps it's time to look for another job. Craig Gillespie of **MJZ** directed the spot, with music from **Beacon Street Studios**.

User-generated fare also generates viewership online--both before and after the game. And according to research, last year's online views of Big Game spots amounted to almost the number of viewers who were watching on television.

Anheuser-Busch InBev is once more the dominant Super Bowl sponsor in terms of ad time, with five minutes. The annual rite of Big Game advertising for A-B is its decision, sometimes close to the 11th hour, as to what spots to run from a pool of commercials that have been produced for possible Super Bowl use promoting varied brands (Budweiser, Bud Light, Bud Light Lime, etc.). Among the candidates is a Budweiser :60 entitled "Bridge" directed by Paul Middleditch of **aWHITELABELproduct** for **DDB Chicago**, with post/VFX from **The Mill NY** and music out of Elias Arts. Additionally St. Louis agency **Cannonball** reportedly has several Bud Light spots in the running, a possible candidate being one directed by Sean Ehringer from **Tool of North America**, with visual effects from **AXYZ** and sound design by **Pirate**.

DDB Chicago also has a Cars.com ad scheduled for the Super Bowl game. Titled "Timothy Richman," the ad was directed by MJZ's Gillespie and edited by **Cut+Run**'s Steve Gandolfi, with VFX from Mass Market. Indeed MJZ looms as a major Super Bowl player. Besides the two spots helmed by Gillespie, MJZ's Dante Ariola has directed a pair of commercials, including "Whale of a Tale," for Bridgestone out of **The Richards Group**, Dallas. Furthermore, MJZ's Tom Kuntz directed Monster's Super Bowl spot out of **BBDO** New York. Both Gillespie and Kuntz, by the way, recently earned nominations for the **DGA** Award as best commercial director of 2009.

Another production house figuring prominently in the Big Game is **Anonymous Content**. Word is that the Chrysler commercial was directed by Mark Romanek of Anonymous for **Wieden+Kennedy**. Also from W+K are two Coca-Cola :60s in the continuing "Open Happiness" campaign, including "Sleepwalker" directed by Garth Davis of Anonymous and edited by Kirk Baxter of **Rock Paper Scissors**, with visual effects from **MPC**. Anonymous' Davis too is a nominee for the DGA Award this year. The commercial shows us the journey of a man who unknowingly braves the treacherous, wild plains of Africa as he sleepwalks for an ice cold Coke.

The other Coke :60 out of W+K finds us in the land of *The Simpsons*, where even billionaire Montgomery Burns cannot escape the economic downturn. He loses all his worldly possessions but in the end finds that life's simple pleasures, like friends, family and a Coke, are what matter most. Animation studio **Film Roman** and **Gracie Films** produced the spot, titled "Hard Times."

Additionally W+K has an ad for Electronic Arts slated for Super Sunday. Word is that the spot was produced by **Blur**.

Grey New York has Super Bowl work on tap for E*Trade, the NFL and TruTV. Word is that the director on at least some of the E*Trade fare during the Big Game was John J. Budion of **Click 3X**.

Meanwhile **Deutsch LA** has a couple of Super Bowl spots in tow--one for Volkswagen, the other for Dr Pepper. The latter was directed by Paul Hunter of **Prettybird**, Santa Monica, and edited by David Chechel and Jay Nelson of **Cut+Run**, with VFX from **D Train Effects**.

Hyundai returns to the Super Bowl, this time with work from agency **Innocean Worldwide Americas**, Irvine, Calif., directed by Noam Murro of **Biscuit Filmworks**, with music out of Beacon Street.

Honda is also again aboard the Big Game ad roster, promoting its new Accord Crosstour. Andy Hall of **Elastic** directed for agency **RPA**. And rounding out the automotive advertisers is Kia from **David & Goliath**, Los Angeles. This is Kia's first ever Super Bowl commercial. Titled "Joyride," the spot features the new Kia Sorento and a colorful cast of characters, including a life-size Sock Monkey, Muno (from the popular kids show Yo Gabba Gabba!), Robot, Teddy and MR. X (Blabla dolls collection). Their road trip to an odd collection of destinations, pays homage to a child's imagination. "Joyride" was directed by Carl Erik Rinsch of **RSA Films** and edited by Paul Martinez of **Arcade**, with **Asylum** serving as VFX house.

In addition to its earlier cited Monster.com ad, BBDO New York has a Mars/Snickers candy bar spot slated to debut during the first commercial break of the Super Bowl. Titled "Game," the spot stars Betty White and Abe Vigoda and proves "you're not you when you're hungry."

The aforementioned Dr Pepper is among a roster of first-time Super Bowl advertisers. Online vacation rentals listings service HomeAway is another newcomer to the Big Game, with a spot featuring Chevy Chase and Beverly D'Angelo reprising their roles as the hubby and wife from the *National Lampoon Vacation* movies. The :30 was directed by Bryan Buckley of **Hungry Man** for **Publicis in the West**.

Boost Mobile is another Super Bowl debutante with a :30 from agency **180 Los Angeles** reportedly reprising the "Super Bowl Shuffle" celebratory dance originally performed by members of the '85 NFL champion Chicago Bears. **Warp@Paydirt** is the production house on the job, with the directors being Tim Heidecker and Eric Wareheim. Text answer service kgb is also slated for Super Sunday, premiering a :30 directed by Kinka Usher from **House of Usher** for agency **Brooklyn Brothers**, with VFX from **A52**.

San Francisco ad agencies are very much in the Big Game mix. **Goodby, Silverstein & Partners** has spots for Diamond Food's Pop Secret pop corn (this work could be a continuation of work featuring a family of movie-loving corn kernel characters), Denny's, Doritos (part of the alluded to "Crash the Super Bowl!" contest for user-created spots), And San

Francisco-based Venables Bell & Partners has a :60 for Audi and a :30 for Intel, the latter marked by some geek-style humor. There was also word of a Vizio spot from Venables Bell directed by Wally Pfister of **Independent Media**.

Draftfcb is also active in the Big Game, with spots for Dockers (with agency OMD's Ignition Factory), the U.S. Census Bureau and Taco Bell. Biscuit's Noam Murro directed Dockers for Draftfcb, San Francisco. Kinka Usher of House of Usher directed Taco Bell for Draftfcb Orange County. And Christopher Guest of **Go Film** helmed U.S. Census for Draftfcb New York.

Ogilvy is another Super Bowl player with work reportedly for Motorola, and Unilever's Dove Men Care.

Teleflora and its in-house agency **Fire Station** are returning to Super Sunday for the second straight year, this time with a spot directed by Tim Hamilton of Go Film, with VFX by Asylum. And GoDaddy.com via its in-house agency will be at it again--the dot-com advertiser has become a Super Bowl regular.

Another perennial ad sector that again will be represented are the motion picture studios for varied releases. Universal Pictures, Paramount Pictures and Disney Pictures are scheduled to have spots on the Big Game.