

For Marketing, the Most Valuable Player Might Be YouTube – By Stuart Elliott – The New York Times – 2/5/08

SOME religions believe in an afterlife. Others do not. On Madison Avenue after the Super Bowl, most everyone is a believer.

That is because the Internet, digital video recorders, mobile devices and other technologies are giving a strong postgame presence to the commercials that appear each year during the Super Bowl. The spots can be watched later on Web sites, forwarded to friends through e-mail, discussed on message boards and assessed on blogs.

It is a far cry from just a few years ago, when the Super Bowl commercials disappeared after the game, along with the losing team. Now the strategy among sponsors is to maximize postgame exposure to help amortize the eye-popping cost of a Super Sunday spot — this time, an estimated \$2.7 million for each 30 seconds of national air time.

For instance, the commercials “got a higher audience than the game” in homes with the TiVo video recorder service, said Todd Juenger, vice president and general manager for audience research and measurement at the New York office of TiVo.

“There is rewinding and multiple viewing of the ads” on Super Bowl Sunday, he added. “It’s one of the few times it happens.”

Super Bowl XLII, broadcast by Fox on Sunday, was no exception, Mr. Juenger said. TiVo’s list of most-watched spots was topped by one of two for E*Trade featuring a “talking” baby; in this spot, the infant spits up at the end of his spiel.

The E*Trade commercial, created by the Grey Global division of the WPP Group, was followed on the TiVo list by one featuring Justin Timberlake, for a music promotion co-sponsored by Pepsi-Cola and Amazon; a spot for Doritos created by a consumer for a contest last year; one for Coca-Cola Classic that spoofed the red-blue political divide; and a spot with Carmen Electra for Ice Breakers Ice Cubes gum.

The results “say something about the TiVo audience in terms of what works to get something rewound,” Mr. Juenger said, listing tactics like humor, celebrities and surprise punch lines.

The Timberlake spot came from BBDO Worldwide, part of the Omnicom Group. Pepsi-Cola and Doritos are both owned by PepsiCo. The spot for Coca-Cola was created by Wieden & Kennedy. The ad for Ice Breakers, a Hershey brand, was from TracyLocke, also part of Omnicom.

Scores of Web sites are offering computer users a chance to watch video clips of the Super Bowl commercials, among them AOL, MSNBC, MySpace, Spike and YouTube.

During the Fox broadcast of the game — watched by 97.5 million viewers, a record for a Super Bowl, data from Nielsen estimated — the announcers twice reminded the audience to “log on to myspace.com” if “you’ve missed any of the Super Bowl commercials.” (MySpace and Fox are owned by the News Corporation.)

Even specialty Web sites are getting into the act. The Huffington Post, at huffingtonpost.com, known for politics, is wooing visitors to a section that offers a look at the “best 2008 Super Bowl ads.”

And three Web sites operated by the automotive expert Edmunds Inc. (edmunds.com, carspace.com and AutoObserver.com) are carrying video clips of and discussions about car commercials from companies like the Audi division of Volkswagen, General Motors, Hyundai Motor America and Toyota Motor.

On some Web sites, visitors could vote for their favorite spots. In the sixth annual AOL Super Sunday Ad Poll, conducted by the AOL division of Time Warner, a Budweiser commercial that spoofed "Rocky," starring a Clydesdale and a Dalmatian, was the leading vote-getter as of Monday afternoon.

The Bud spot was followed by a commercial for Bridgestone Firestone with a screaming squirrel and a commercial for Coca-Cola Classic that brought to life balloons from the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.

The spot for Budweiser beer, an Anheuser-Busch product, was created by DDB Worldwide, part of Omnicom. The Bridgestone Firestone commercial, one of two sponsored by Bridgestone during the game, was created by the Richards Group. The Coke Classic spot was from Wieden & Kennedy.

Visitors to YouTube, owned by Google, are even being offered an incentive to vote for their favorite spot at a special section of the site (youtube.com/adblitz): The commercial attracting the most votes will be featured on the YouTube home page next Tuesday.

The spot that had been watched most often on YouTube as of Monday afternoon was for SoBe Life Water, sold by PepsiCo, featuring animated lizards dancing to "Thriller." Not far behind was a spot for GoDaddy, a Web services company, which directed viewers to godaddy.com to watch a risqué commercial that the company said Fox had refused to run.

The SoBe spot was created by the Arnell Group, another Omnicom agency, and the GoDaddy.com spot was created internally.

Bob Parsons, the chief executive of GoDaddy, wrote Monday on his blog (bobparsons.com) that the "banned" spot had been watched online Sunday more than two million times. And traffic on Monday was "up over four times normal levels," he added.

"Our Web site has never been busier," Mr. Parsons said.

The cross-promotion between the GoDaddy commercial and Web site was indicative of the increasing efforts by Super Bowl sponsors to integrate their TV and online presences.

"The 'torture test' for brands beyond their Super Bowl ads is how to make it easy for consumers to find the ads and engage with them, whether you put them on Web sites, on YouTube or make them easy to search for on Google," said Pete Blackshaw, executive vice president at the Nielsen Online Strategic Services division of the Nielsen Company.

"I think a lot advertisers are still struggling to organize around this," Mr. Blackshaw said, as they try to coordinate the work of various agencies that specialize in different tasks like traditional ads, digital ads or media placement.

“The conflict comes to a head in the Super Bowl,” he added, “when there’s a lot of money riding on the campaign.”

Mr. Blackshaw praised sponsors that created special Web sites, known as microsites, to promote their campaigns. He singled out as notable the one for the Tide to Go stain remover sold by Procter & Gamble (mytalkingstain.com). The site was created by the Digitas division of the Publicis Groupe, whose Saatchi & Saatchi division created the Tide to Go commercial for the game.

Steven Siegel, vice president for brand solutions at HipCricket, a mobile-marketing agency, said he was disappointed there were “not as many examples of mobile programs as I would have liked to see” in spots and promotions during the game. One he recalled, sponsored by the Cadillac division of General Motors, asked viewers to vote by text message for the most valuable player.

“A lot of Super Bowl viewership takes place outside the home, away from your computer,” Mr. Siegel said. “With mobile, you can immediately engage with consumers at a bar, at a friend’s house.”

Some sponsors used old-school media for postgame outreach. Several, including Bridgestone Firestone, Doritos, E*Trade, Under Armour and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, ran ads in newspapers Monday to encourage conversation about their spots.

At least one advertiser missing from the Super Bowl sought to ride the coattails of a competitor that had been there. The Miller Brewing division of SABMiller ran an ad in USA Today that offered mock congratulations to Anheuser-Busch for the success of its spots for Bud Light.

“This certainly calls for beer,” the ad teased. “A nice cold Miller Lite.”

Dave Peacock, vice president for marketing at Anheuser-Busch, dismissed the ad as “one of those things we almost don’t dignify with a response.”

“We learned in research in the last few months that people prefer to hear a positive story,” Mr. Peacock said, which is why he believes the heart-warming “Rocky” parody for Budweiser did so well.

Anheuser-Busch, usually the biggest Super Bowl ad spender each year, is known for how intensely — and how far ahead — it works on its commercials.

Asked what the company intends for Super Bowl XLIII, scheduled for Feb. 1, 2009, Mr. Peacock replied, laughing, “We have a meeting this afternoon.”