

The Schism



Thoughts, musings, and more on the communications and marketing industry from McDougall Travers Collins.

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February 10, 2012

Skechers & the Greyhound Controversy



The Schism welcomes guest blogger Katie Corbut, an account coordinator with MTC.

The theme of the year for Super Bowl commercials was definitely “cuteness,” seeing as how probably half of them contained a baby or furry companion.

The Budweiser “Weego”

commercial was one of my favorites, mostly because it contained the “help rescue” plug at the end – kudos to Bud Light. I also loved the new Volkswagen Bug commercial with the overweight golden retriever – it’s too bad most humans aren’t this motivated to get in shape! I of course, loved the Doritos commercial with the grandmother and grandson, whom she catapults into the air to steal the bag away from the little boy. And I can’t leave out the E-Trade commercials – I laugh every time.

There was one commercial, however, that really threw me. As everyone in the room laughed when the French bulldog moon-danced across the screen, I was too busy wondering why greyhound racing was the base of the spot, when the sport has generated so much backlash in recent years.

Dozens of animal rights activists have jumped to the rescue of greyhounds in the weeks leading up to, and after the Super Bowl. In my personal view, greyhound racing is an industry fraught with cruelty. Greyhounds used as racers typically live their entire lives in cramped cages and are kept muzzled by their trainers at all times. These gentle dogs are extremely sensitive, yet they rarely know the comfort of a kind word or a gentle touch. When too old, injured, or tired to continue racing, the dogs are often discarded. Since 2001, more than half of American greyhound-racing tracks have closed because of the public outcry against the cruelty inflicted upon dogs. The remaining tracks have seen a decrease in ticket sales.

Greyhound rescue groups, adoption organizations and animal lovers all around the United States have been in an uproar since the commercial aired, some even began petitioning Skechers before the spot aired. [One blog](#) offered a petition to sign that would be sent to

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the managing parties at Skechers, in an effort to further show exactly how many people were saddened by their choice to ignore the concerned public.

For its part, Skechers has been mum on the issue, only noting that it complied with Humane Society standards in the filming of the spot.

Now Super Bowl advertising is no stranger to controversy. Remember Groupon's maligned spot from last year? So against that backdrop, was this a good move on Skechers' part? I'd say no, but I have a personal experience with greyhounds that puts me in a difficult position to evaluate this situation.

Do I think there are other ways in which Skechers could have communicated the same message, and had the same pug do the moon-dance in little red shoes? Yes. There are plenty of canine competitions that are not illegal in 38 states – e.g., dock jumping and agility courses.

As unfortunate it is that Skechers did not see fit to heed the pleas of greyhound organization groups, it is undeniable that greyhound racing has now gathered more awareness nationwide. So, is it possible the cause even came out ahead because of Skechers' approach?

What are your thoughts? Was Skechers insensitive to the issue, or is the controversy surrounding the spot overblown?



When she's not helping clients navigate the waters, you may find Katie Corbut kayaking. Or quoting lines from the Lord of the Rings films. But usually not at the same time. Katie, her fiancé John, and their cat and dog live in Buffalo.

Posted by Mike McDougall, APR at [4:35 PM](#)

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