

The New York Times

Business Day

Search All NYTimes.com



Media & Advertising

WORLD U.S. N.Y. / REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SCIENCE HEALTH SPORTS OPINION ARTS STYLE TRAVEL JOBS REAL ESTATE AUTOS

Search

Global DealBook Markets Economy Energy Media Personal Tech Small Business Your Money

ADVERTISING

Judging the Super Bowl Commercials, From Charming to Smarmy

By STUART ELLIOTT

Published: February 5, 2012

SOME say, “Enough is enough.” Others say, “Too much is never enough.” When it came to the advertising bowl that took place inside [Super Bowl XLVI](#) on Sunday, enough was too much.

Enlarge This Image



THUMBS DOWN: A CareerBuilder ad that brought back its chimps dressed as humans.

Too many commercials fell back on tactics that were too familiar from a plethora of Super Bowl spots: anthropomorphic animals, second-class celebrities, slapstick violence and riding the coattails of popular culture. Risk-taking, rule-breaking ideas were as hard to find among the more than 50 commercials as good taste in a GoDaddy ad.

Super Bowl Ads



GoDaddy: Body Paint

Yes, sad to say, once again GoDaddy served up [stale cheesecake](#) in the form of [two commercials](#) that exploited women in the guise of empowerment. A similarly smarmy tone suffused [spots for Teleflora](#), in which the model Adriana Lima told men, “[Valentine’s Day](#) is not that complicated. Give and you shall receive”; and 2nd Story Software, which compared the relief felt when getting a “TaxACT federal return totally free” to the relief felt when urinating in a pool.

The dearth of originality was underlined by multiple

RECOMMEND

TWITTER

LINKEDIN

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

REPRINTS

SHARE



Get DealBook by E-Mail

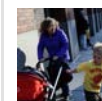


Sign up for the latest financial news delivered before the opening bell and after the market close.

[See Sample](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

MOST E-MAILED

MOST VIEWED



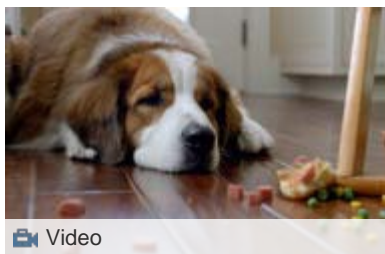
1. [Affluent, Born Abroad and Choosing New York's Public Schools](#)

2. WELL
[How 1-Minute Intervals Can Improve Your Health](#)



3. RESTAURANT REVIEW
[A Map of Your Taste Buds Shaped Like Italy](#)

4. WELL
[Life's Frailty, and the Gestures That Go a](#)



Video

Volkswagen: The Dog Strikes Back



Video

Teleflora: Adriana Lima



Video

Honda CR-V: "Matthew's Day Off"



Video

Chevy: Happy Grad

Enlarge This Image



THUMBS UP: Jerry Seinfeld and the "Soup Nazi" promoted Acura.

Enlarge This Image

appearances of some famous faces, as if America suffered from a star-power shortage. Ms. Lima turned up in a [spot for Kia](#) in addition to her tawdry turn for Teleflora; the former football star Deion Sanders was hired by Bridgestone tires as well as Century 21.

[The Century 21 spot](#) also featured Donald J. Trump, symbolizing how its agents are "smarter." To quote the title of a Coca-Cola commercial, "Argh."

That was not the only sighting of an overexposed celebrity whose sell-by date has surely passed. [A commercial for Pepsi-Cola](#) offered up Elton John and Flava Flav. A spot for a sibling soda, [Pepsi Max](#), featured Regis Philbin, declaring, "I'm back." (But has he ever really gone away?) And a commercial for Skechers ended with a cameo by Mark Cuban, making a weak joke related to his ownership of the Dallas Mavericks.

When stars were not recycled, concepts were. The Pepsi Max spot reprised a premise from a previous Pepsi Max spot that had been borrowed from an old Pepsi-Cola commercial. And it ripped off the "Target lady" character from ["Saturday Night Live."](#) (You would think the awful "PepSuber" spot in the 2009 Super Bowl for Pepsi-Cola, based on the MacGruber character from "S.N.L.," would have cured PepsiCo of doing that.)

[CareerBuilder brought back](#) its chimpanzees dressed as humans, meant to personify nitwit co-workers. But the only nitwits were the creators of the commercial, who ignored a growing belief on Madison Avenue that it is wrong to use live apes in ads.

The Skechers spot also raised the hackles of animal activists, who complained that it promoted greyhound racing. Certainly one of the many other advertisers using dogs could have lent Skechers a breed that would not have offended anyone.

Other sponsors that trod well-worn paths included Coca-Cola, [reviving its polar bears](#); Doritos, sponsoring another contest to "crash the Super Bowl" with consumer-made commercials; [E*Trade, bringing back](#) its baby; Hulu Plus;

Long Way

5. [Flaw Found in an Online Encryption Method](#)
6. OP-ED COLUMNIST
[The Materialist Fallacy](#)
7. [The Therapist May See You Anytime, Anywhere](#)
8. OP-ED COLUMNIST
[That Old Black Magic](#)
9. CAMPAIGN STOPS
[A Widow's Wisdom](#)
10. RECIPES FOR HEALTH
[Chicken Stews, to Savor or Store Away](#)

[Go to Complete List »](#)

[Show My Recommendations](#)



"These Seven Sicknesses"

ALSO IN THEATER »

- Family friendly shows
- Last chance to see these shows

nytimes.com

THEATER

ADVERTISEMENTS



GET A FREE NOOK SIMPLE TOUCH™ The New York Times | nook

When you sign up for a one-year NOOK subscription to The Times. [LEARN MORE >](#)



THUMBS DOWN: A spot for Century 21 that featured Donald Trump.

[Enlarge This Image](#)

and Samsung Mobile.

Thankfully, there were a few gems amid the rhinestones displayed during the game. (A Chrysler Group ad, with Clint Eastwood, was powerful, but ran during halftime.) Here is a look at some of those high points.

ACURA O.K., asking Jerry Seinfeld to reprise his “Seinfeld” persona, abetted by the “Soup Nazi,” was no brainstorm. The cleverness came in centering the commercial — for a model, the Acura NSX, not due until 2015 — on Mr. Seinfeld’s mania for collecting cars and having another famed collector, Jay Leno, supply a surprise ending.

ANHEUSER-BUSCH INBEV A toast is in order. The frat-boy humor with misogynistic overtones that has long sullied Super Bowl spots for Bud Light beer was refreshingly absent.

BEST BUY A year after a silly Super Bowl spot with Justin Bieber and Ozzy Osbourne, Best Buy celebrated real achievement with a commercial honoring technological innovators like Philippe Kahn, who declares, “I created the camera phone,” and Kevin Systrom, a founder of the photo-sharing app Instagram.

CHEVROLET A [timely commercial](#) for the Silverado truck wittily defused fears that the world will meet an apocalyptic end in 2012 and poked fun at other products like Ford trucks and Twinkies.

GENERAL ELECTRIC Two commercials for G.E. did something rare for Super Bowl spots. They touched on a serious subject, industrial policy, by [saluting the workers](#) who make G.E. appliances and turbines in Kentucky and New York. The point could have been underlined by mentioning that G.E. changed its mind about plans, announced in 2008, to spin off or sell the appliance business.

HONDA Almost any advertiser could have enticed Matthew Broderick to re-enact his role as the hooky-playing fun-lover in “Ferris Beuller’s Day Off.” But [Honda’s spot, for the CR-V](#) compact crossover, made sense because the product’s current campaign encourages consumers to take time off from life’s duties.

METLIFE A [charming commercial](#) finally provided the “Peanuts” gang, who have been peddling MetLife for decades, with some company: 56 characters from the inkwells of



THUMBS UP: A MetLife commercial joined 56 cartoon characters with the usual “Peanuts” gang.

Ads by Google

what's this?

[Swiffer Commercials](#)

Trap Dust & Dirt Mops & Brooms

Can Leave Behind. Get Swiffer®.

www.Swiffer.com

cartoon legends like Hanna-Barbera, Harvey Comics, Looney Tunes and UPA.

TOYOTA A commercial for the “reinvented” [Toyota Camry](#) reinvented Super Bowl advertising with what may be the first gay-friendly moment in a game spot. One character, an awkward guy, seems as accepting of finding seven hunks in his living room as he is of finding seven babes.

VOLKSWAGEN A [sweet commercial](#) about a dog determined to get in shape to chase a 2012 Beetle took a detour at the end with a surprising salute to fans of “[The Force](#),” the popular spot for the VW Passat from Super Bowl XLV.

A version of this article appeared in print on February 6, 2012, on page B2 of the New York edition with the headline: Judging the Super Bowl Commercials, From Charming to Smarmy.



Get 50% Off The New York Times & Free All Digital Access.

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

REPRINTS

Get Free E-mail Alerts on These Topics

Advertising and Marketing

Super Bowl

Television

Celebrities

Ads by Google

[what's this?](#)

[Volkswagen Bolt Dog](#)

A Dog of All Traits. Watch Him Now

in the 2012 VW Game Day Ad.

www.VW.com

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



[DINING & WINE »](#)

[HEALTH »](#)

[OPINION »](#)

[MUSIC »](#)

[OPINION »](#)

[U.S. »](#)

[Egan: A Widow's Wisdom](#)

In Walla Walla, Wash., same-sex marriage



Five Dishes at Il Buco Alimentari e Vineria



How 1-Minute Intervals Can Improve Health



Borderlines: The Undiscovered Country



Mahler Is O.K., but Gustavo, He's Amazing

finds an unlikely Republican champion.



Out of Office, but Not Out of Things to Say

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y. / Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Autos](#) | [Site Map](#)

© 2012 The New York Times Company | [Privacy](#) | [Your Ad Choices](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Terms of Sale](#) | [Corrections](#) |  [RSS](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Advertise](#)