



POSTED IN [LEGAL MARKETING](#)

Superbowl Commercials - The Ugly of 2016

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON FEBRUARY 18, 2016

What good would looking at commercials from Super Bowl 50 be without looking at the worst of the worst? That's right, today's post is all about the UGLY commercials of 2016. And boy, did we have some ugly ones.

While this ad still managed to [get some good press](#) and actually (if you can believe it) immediately started trending when it aired during the game, for me, this commercial was the WORST of this year's crop:

Mountain Dew: Puppy Monkey Baby

Mtn Dew Kickstart: Pupppmonkeybaby | Super B...  



I know, I'm sorry, I have to include it again for you to appreciate why I chose this ad for the ugly list.

So, why is this one so terrible? First of all, it's creepy. The [Huffington Post](#) said:

“

#PuppyMonkeyBaby quickly became a trending Twitter topic, and most agreed on one thing: there's a line between cute and horrifying.”

I particularly loved when they said “Mountain Dew? How about Mountain DON'T.”

The concept here is that Mountain Dew created a new drink – Kickstart – which is a combination of things: Mountain Dew, juice, and caffeine (isn't Mountain Dew already the most caffeinated soda on the market?). They're saying “hey, we combined three great things, so why not combine three other great things – a puppy, a monkey, and a baby – to become our spokething for this new drink.”

No.

I can't even watch this ad a second time, and I haven't spoken to anyone who's felt differently about it. Does it mean that we're having a conversation about Mountain Dew? Sure. Does it make me want to BUY Mountain Dew? No. In fact, it makes me question their sanity a little bit. Although, my supposition is that if I drank the already caffeinated Mountain Dew, combined with more juice (generally containing sugar) and yet more caffeine, this puppy monkey baby might actually start to look pretty cute. And that IS terrifying.

What are the lessons for lawyers and law firms?

- Do some beta testing of your message first with your clients to make sure it's something that people like. Mountain Dew claims that this is aimed at a certain audience, and this audience LIKES puppy monkey baby (really?), so that assumes that they did do some testing of their message among their target audience. And it's a good idea. You don't have to be doing an ad to see if your message resonates with your clients. Running a new social media campaign? Launching a new website? Re-branding the firm? Trying to establish what your personal message is? Call up a few of your most trusted clients and use them to give you feedback on what you're doing. Ensure that it is in line with how they see you as a lawyer and law firm. Go a step further and make sure that the channels that you're using are also the places where your clients will see your message.

Doritos: Ultrasound



Here's another ad that was massively polarizing, and that I found to be completely disturbing. The underlying message is that Doritos are so delicious that even your unborn child will want some. Okay, sounds fairly reasonable.

But the delivery of that message is pretty horrifying, even if it's only hinted at, and not expressed fully in the commercial. A few tweets following the commercial said it best:

“

“we'll start with the idea of premature babies and then work backwards,” said the Doritos ad exec.

– Brandon McCarthy (@BMcCarthy32) [February 7, 2016](#)

“

Nothing's more appetizing than an extremely pre mature birth. Way to go Doritos. [#SB50](#)

– The Sklar Brothers (@SklarBrothers) [February 7, 2016](#)

Those two tweets sum up for me why this commercial makes it on the ugly list – premature birth and food are never two things I want to associate with each other. I think Doritos more than missed the mark on this one, even if a large segment of people just thought of it as a funny commercial.

So what then, are the lessons for lawyers and law firms?

- Message testing is again important – is the message that you’re discussing internally the one that people are understanding when they see, hear, and experience it? So many times, something that sounds good on paper or in theory doesn’t work well in practice. One of my favorite quotes is from Anais Nin – “We don’t see things as they are; we see them as we are.” I’ve learned that to be very true, and it means as much for the way that people experience us professionally as it does for the way they experience us personally. People will interact with your brand (lawyers, that means who you are as a professional) from their own perspective, with their own experience and biases. Which is why it’s always a good idea to have a sampling of data to drive your decisions – have you asked a few of your clients their opinion on your website, initiative, project, etc? It can be easy to see things from one perspective, and to think of them as humorous or smart or thought-provoking, but someone else may see it as horrifying or silly or thoughtless. While there’s obviously no way to please everyone, and in the law, you’re less likely to be provoking such huge swings of moods about your messaging, it’s still useful to check in and ensure that what you’re putting out there is only as provocative as you’re prepared for it to be. That’s not to say you shouldn’t be provocative – you can absolutely be; but make sure that it’s your intention.

OIC is Different

OICisDifferent.com – Big Game Spot “ENVY” – O...  



Oh, this commercial.

Where to begin?

First of all, although I appreciate that there should be room for every brand, if it wants to spend the money, to be allowed to have space to advertise during the big game, there are just some things you don’t

want to think about when you're trying to enjoy a sporting even with your family and friends. Constipation, toenail fungus, and scientology would be high on that list. So while I suppose that there's no way to ban those organizations from advertising, it's really quite a downer when they do.

Bearing that in mind, the ad is already off to a bad start, because they don't know their audience. The partying, lighthearted, football fan crowd is not going to be interested in talking about whether opioids are making it difficult for them to go to the bathroom. They just aren't.

Secondly, the ad itself is embarrassing and silly. Who, out to a business lunch with colleagues, uses the restroom and comes back to the table, hitching up his pants in success and basically gives them a thumbs up? No one. Then we're treated to an image of a dog urinating (not the same thing, by the way), and a store full of prunes. Honestly?

It's uncomfortable, all over the place. And the message is supposed to be that if you take opioids for pain, perhaps you want to try this brand, which won't give you the same side effects. Okay, great. Is there NOT a better way to deliver the message? Or a better time at which to do it? Are those dealing with opioid-related side effects really the same universe of people watching the Super Bowl, or are they just hoping to reach the biggest audience possible?

The lessons for lawyers and law firms:

- Bigger isn't always better: It can sometimes seem like a good idea to reach a huge number of people at once. But it doesn't matter if you have a million followers on Twitter if only 100 of those people care about what you're tweeting. It's far better to only have those 100 people following you, and for you to regularly engage with them. Messaging is the same. If you are targeted in your campaigns, regardless of what it is, and you're getting your message in front of the right people, it doesn't matter how many of them you're getting in front of. Quality trumps quantity every time, particularly when it comes to law firm marketing. (And I'd guess opioid-marketing too).
- Is that your best message: They focus here on one single side effect, which has me wondering – is that their best message? Is that the only thing that they could come up with to focus on, or was it just the easiest thing to focus on? Prescription ads are tough, and so ubiquitous these days. Within the legal industry, and among your clients, it can feel the same for lawyers too. Everyone is a great, smart lawyer who can partner with their client to give them the solutions-oriented answers that they need. Right? But is that your best message?

Jublia: Tackle It & Xifaxan

Jublia: 'Tackle It'



Jublia gets points here for doing a commercial that is at least related to the subject at hand – Super Bowl 50. However, we’re again looking at something that’s a bit too gross for what you want to be seeing during the biggest football game of the year. They do a few things right, which made me hesitant to put them on the list – they have a football theme and the commercial is done as a cartoon, so we don’t actually have to see anything gross, just picture it. But again, it’s about knowing your audience – people are eating, they’re sitting with friends and family, and the last thing they really want to do is see and talk about toenail fungus.

So I’m going to tie it with another commercial: Xifaxan

Xifaxan Super Bowl 50 Commercial



Same objections – people are eating, it’s not a subject they want to think about in big groups, etc. But again, points for tying it into the big game and making it a cartoon (though, it has to be, by necessity), even if I have no desire to picture my intestines walking around as an animated object.

Lessons for lawyers and law firms:

- **Timing is critical:** Many of the topics you deal with are things that make business people uncomfortable. You're there to help them avoid or solve their problems, and that's a relief, but there are certain times that they may not want to be reminded of those things. So it's important that you're reaching out to them at a time that will work for them. Sometimes you may send them something, and they file it away for when they need it, and other times, you catch them right at the right moment when they need your assistance again and the timing is right. But these ads make me think of those awkward moments when someone walks up to another lawyer at a networking reception and starts to read off a list of their practice areas and capabilities, while forcing their business card into their hand, instead of just having a human-to-human conversation. Timing is just as important as the message itself.
- **Get creative:** The other thing I think in looking at these ads is "is there another way to communicate this?" I appreciate that the ad execs have worked hard to not make us look at images of toenail fungus, but there must be another way to share the feeling of relief that both medications offer, without having to talk about the illness itself. I'm sure people who suffer from these ailments are uncomfortable enough about their situations without having to deal with commercials reminding them about it – why not focus on the results, instead of the problem? That's a great message for lawyers and law firms too – lawyers are problem solvers. In your messaging, is there a way to communicate that relief that you offer clients in either foreseeing an issue and helping them skirt it, or helping them handle something that has come up, without having to focus too much on the issue itself (which is often anxiety-inducing)?

Honorable Mentions

Two honorable mentions in the ugly category – and please feel free to add your own in the comments!

- **Super Bowl babies:** While not strictly brand commercials, my understanding is that the NFL was trying to make their brand appear a bit more friendly in the wake of all of the discussions about the dangers of the sport and the rise in concussions, etc. These commercials were pretty icky though, causing you to think about the babies that were born as a result of people celebrating a Super Bowl win in their city. As a friend pointed out, not really what he wanted to be watching while sitting there with his 15-year-old son.
- **Scientology:** I'm a big fan of leaving religion out of everything, always. Especially advertising.

