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## Super Bowl Commercials: The Bad of 2017

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON FEBRUARY 9, 2017

Now that we've seen our lackluster list of "good" Super Bowl commercials for 2017, let's dive into the ones that I thought weren't so hot. The majority of spots made it into my "mediocre" category, so it's harder to choose "bad" and "ugly" ads this year than you might think – but I've buckled down and come up with a few for you!

### CURE Auto Insurance 2017 Super Bowl Commercial: Don't Follow Too Closely

CURE Auto Insurance 2017 Super Bowl Commerc...



CURE Auto Insurance has never made an ad I've liked, and this year is no exception. But I find this one to be especially disturbing. The message in this spot is the idea that you shouldn't "follow too closely" – they're an auto insurance company, so they're banking on a double entendre. They literally mean that you shouldn't follow people too closely in your cars (though they'll protect you from people that do, is the brand claim), but the metaphor in the spot is people who "follow" you too closely on social media.

However, the ad comes off as really creepy and stalker-esque. Which real-life following mishaps can cause too. Differently executed, this commercial might have been funny. But instead, it's a bit traumatizing – for anyone who has ever been harassed online and off, cyber- or in-person stalked, this ad isn't funny in the least. And they're an auto insurance company, whose message also gets lost in there somewhere too. Not only is it a big miss on the messaging, it leaves me with a negative feeling about the company, which is really not something you want to achieve with your marketing.

### **What are the lessons for lawyers and law firms?**

- Really test out your marketing and messaging before making it public. What seems funny or cute to you in a conference room or among a few colleagues may really not play well in the marketplace. That goes for things you might say in presentations, social media content, articles, and your actual branding and marketing. Ensure that the audiences that you're intending this for understand what your message is and that there aren't unintended messages being communicated instead. This becomes especially relevant when you have audiences in multiple jurisdictions, and in the global world of the internet, we pretty much all do whether we intend to or not.
- Don't forego your service message in an effort to be glib or clever. Sometimes it gets tiresome to always have to rely on the same messaging day in and out, because you're the one who is always hearing it. But research shows that your audiences have to hear a message multiple times to receive it, and more and more as our attention spans dwindle. That's not to say we don't need to be creative in our delivery, or explore new and different ways to convey the services we offer, but trying so hard to be clever instead of being really excellent at what you actually do isn't always effective. CURE was so intent on making the connection between following someone closely online and following too closely in your car, that they forgot to sell us car insurance.

## **Yellow Tail Wine Super Bowl Ad – Yellowtail Wines Commercial w/ Ellie Gonsalves**

Yellow Tail Wine Super Bowl Ad - Yellowtail Wine...



Oh Yellow Tail. I'm so disappointed in you.

It's hard not to have high hopes for a commercial with a kangaroo in it, and a brand whose tagline is "Let's Yellow Tail." But they did NOT deliver in this spot, which simply comes off as awkward, weird and unconnected. The kangaroo tells us it's an Australian brand, the guy in the yellow suit provides some color context, and there's an Australian model, who most Americans watching the Super Bowl would not be familiar with thrown in for additional flavor. But otherwise, it's just a mess.

### **What are the lessons for lawyers and law firms?**

- Know your audience. I know I say this a lot, but it continues to bear repeating, and clearly even major brands don't always pay attention. Yellow Tail is a clearly Australian brand and I applaud them for making that a significant part of their branding – I'm a huge fan of that. But the spot was designed to be a Super Bowl spot for US fans, who, while absolutely recognizing kangaroos, would not have known who Ellie Gonsalves was (I had to look her up). That's not to say she can't be included in the commercial, but her cameo just isn't going to mean very much to the viewing audience in terms of star power (as a model trying to break into the US market, it was obviously effective, as she was subsequently offered a movie role with The Rock). For your own purposes though, ensure that you're making the right connections with your audience. Sometimes, it can feel like you're speaking a different language, even when it's the same one – we and Australians speak English, but our cultural references are different. You and your clients may speak English, but your day to day interaction with your practice has you using words and phrases in conversation that you don't even recognize as being legalese anymore. From time to time, bring in someone as a neutral third party to read your work, listen in on your presentations or podcasts, role play some of your networking conversations, and help you to better translate for your audiences in a way that THEY will understand and appreciate.
- Have a clear story. The ad goes *part* of the way towards the idea of "bringing Australia to the US" but not far enough – either that's what they want to express in this message, or it's not, but commit to it. As we talked about in yesterday's post, storytelling matters and can mean the difference between someone connecting with you and wanting to work with you, or not. But for storytelling to work in your marketing and messaging, it needs to be clear. Yellow Tail was totally haphazard here. How to avoid this? Again, it helps to bring in a totally neutral third party with fresh eyes to give you an unbiased opinion. At times, we can be so close to our own work that our mind automatically makes connections that aren't there – it's like reading over words that are missing in a paragraph and adding them in. That's what editors are for. Bring in your own marketing/audience editors from time to time to keep you effective.

## T-Mobile | #Punished with Kristen Schaal

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T-Mobile | #Punished with Kristen Schaal | :30s T...



I normally heartily endorse “fame-jacking,” where you ride on the coattails of a popular trend to benefit your own content or business. But come on T-Mobile.

Their initial Super Bowl ad, featuring Justin Bieber, was actually not too bad – it got an “okay” in my book, entirely for its social campaign, which centered around encouraging people to submit their own dance moves. It was relevant to the Super Bowl (talking end zone dances) and it was somewhat clever.

But then we had two 50 Shades of Grey-like ads (so a trio of ads that were not all themed...first mistake).

And I just hated them.

To be fair, I have not seen the movies (movie?). I did read the books, but despite being a fan of Jamie Dornan in *The Fall*, I can't bring myself to watch the films. Admittedly, they are hugely popular, but even with that popularity, is attempting to normalize what many see as an abusive relationship through popular acceptance by a large brand like T-Mobile a good thing? (I'm not here to debate the merits or downside of BDSM, but there has been a large backlash against the books by people who feel that the relationship between the two main characters is an unhealthy one, having absolutely nothing to do with general BDSM culture). I was just left feeling icky about the whole thing after watching these.

### **What are the lessons for lawyers and law firms?**

- Choose your fame-jacking carefully. It can be hugely effective to leverage popular news stories and culture with your content – remember Ford Harrison's blog about *The Office* that put a litigation value on the employment issues that cropped up in each episode? But not every trend or story is worth jumping on to, just because everyone is talking about it. Ensure that it makes strategic sense for your firm or your practice (much like Ford Harrison did). People will see through the flash otherwise.

- Make your brand front and center. The first brand that is mentioned in this commercial? Verizon. If you watch it quickly, you may even think that it's a commercial FOR Verizon. Yes, they're negative about Verizon phones, pointing out that using them will get you punished, but this ad was shown late in the Super Bowl, presumably when most people had been drinking for a while (although it will clearly be run again). Using your competitors' name is a risky move, and one that some brands have done effectively, but it can dilute your effectiveness. In this spot, it has the effect of confusing you as to who it's about, unless you pay attention to the end of the ad, where you learn that it's T-Mobile that will save you from all the fees and confusion. Your message may be more effective if you focus on what you do, and just on what you do, instead of talking about what someone else does or doesn't do, or what you don't do that it's good that you don't do – see how confusing even that statement gets? Look for the problem you solve for your clients. Tell them that you solve it. Tell them over and over again. Ignore the other guys. No one will be confused about who you are and what you do.

There are a few others I wasn't overly thrilled with in the crop of ads this year, including KFC's [Georgia Gold Big Game Commercial | Colonel vs. Colonel](#) (I can't describe exactly why I don't think this ad works, but I absolutely can't stand it), American Petroleum Institute's [Power Past Impossible](#) (a bit "head in the sand" to try to prop up their image by running an ad that featured the word "oil" over and over again – using any other word to represent oil would have been better), and H&R Block's [Get Help With Tax Prep From Watson](#) (which is not a bad spot, it just is poorly placed for a Super Bowl commercial – their chief marketing and strategy officer admitted that it's not supposed to be a funny ad, but is supposed to make you wonder what's going on there. But Super Bowl viewers want something funny or poignant – especially if it's about taxes).

Next week, we'll be back with my list of "ugly" commercials. What do you consider to be the "bad" spots from this year's list – ads that are not great, but not awful enough to make it on the ugly list?