

Is \$3M worth it for a Super Bowl ad? Ask GoDaddy

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In this photo taken Monday, Dec. 6, 2010, GoDaddy.com Girl and race car driver Danica Patrick is seen during filming production of the 2010 Super Bowl television commercial for "GoDaddy.com" at the Delfino Studios in Sylmar, Calif. While the Super Bowl is the biggest gambling event of the year, for many advertisers, buying time in the game is a wager that almost always pays off.(AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)

(AP) -- GoDaddy.com was almost unheard of six years ago. Then it ran the most talked-about ad of Super Bowl XXXIX - a spoof of Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction" in which a busty woman appears before a censorship board and a strap breaks on her skimpy top.

The spot was so racy that Fox yanked a second airing scheduled for later in the game. The other fallout? The [Super Bowl](#) ad rolled out each year by GoDaddy, which registers Internet domain names, is now almost as eagerly awaited as the halftime show.

Fox is charging about \$3 million for 30 seconds of ad time this Sunday during Super Bowl XLV. So is the gamble worth it for companies?

"It's not a bet," GoDaddy founder Bob Parsons says, "if you know the outcome."

Online businesses in particular reap big benefits from pitching during the big game. Viewers see the ads, then rush to the Web to see uncut versions of the commercial or snag freebies - and they end up becoming paying customers.

Take Homeaway.com, which last year hired Chevy Chase and Beverly D'Angelo to send up the old National Lampoon movies in a Super Bowl ad. (A snooty concierge tells Chase he's booked in the "Napoleon Suite," which turns out to have a comically low ceiling.)

The ad, the site's first during a Super Bowl, resulted in a huge increase in traffic, which lets vacationers book rental properties. The new business from the Super Bowl ad allowed the site to recoup 60 percent to 70 percent of the cost.

"The rest you're attributing to future value," co-founder and CEO Brian Sharples says.

The company is buying time during Sunday's Packers-Steelers game and will save money on production by not using celebrities. It already spent \$1 million on servers to handle the Internet traffic bump last year and

can reuse the equipment.

CareerBuilder's ads helped the job-listing site leapfrog rival Monster after its first Super Bowl ad in 2005. The amount of money billed to companies posting new job listings in the month after the Super Bowl has risen, on average, by 39 percent above the same month the previous year.

It's back again this year, despite the tough economy. "What we've found year in and year out is that it effectively moves our business," says chief marketing officer Richard Castellini.

And then there's GoDaddy. After Super Bowl XXXIX, it added race car driver Danica Patrick as a "GoDaddy girl," and last year signed "The Biggest Loser" trainer Jillian Michaels. It's already encouraging customers to check out this year's Super Bowl for "our hottest ads yet."

Since the Jackson spoof in 2005, GoDaddy has gone from single digits to nearly 50 percent of market share in domain-name registry. On average, the site says, it has picked up 5 percentage points of market share within the first 48 hours after a Super Bowl ad. It posted almost \$1 billion in revenue last year.

For other big brands, the link between sales and awareness is harder to measure. Most people knew Budweiser before its helmet-wearing bottles squared off in the first Bud Bowl, and most people had tried McDonald's before Larry Bird and Michael Jordan played extreme Horse for a Big Mac.

Still, this year, several major companies are returning to the game after absences to save cash or try different marketing strategies. General Motors, which was under majority government ownership this time last year but has since gone public, will try to drum up excitement for its

small Chevrolet Cruze. PepsiCo wants to put Pepsi Max back on people's radars as a zero-calorie drink after a year of focusing on community grants.

The attraction for advertisers is playing to an audience of about 100 million people all at once. The 68 spots were sold out by Fox in October, an indication that companies are more eager than ever to appeal to the masses. Last year, some spots remained unsold until six days before kickoff.

In some cases, the [ads](#) can work too well, especially if they're linked to online giveaways. Dockers, a Levi Strauss & Co. brand, promised free pants in its ad last year and ended up mailing out twice as many pairs as it expected.

Jen Sey, senior vice president of global marketing, says the strategy paid off by revitalizing the brand and helping the company find new distributors. But this year, it's doing a cheaper pre-game ad and not promising any freebies.

"We're taking those resources and spreading them throughout the year," says Sey.

And Denny's Corp., whose free Grand Slam breakfast campaign created huge lines around the country last year, is staying clear of the game. It has a new ad campaign that won't be shown during the Super Bowl and won't offer anything for free.

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