

Super Bowl advertisers should skip TV ads, focus online

January 26 2012, By Neil Schoenherr

(PhysOrg.com) -- Last year's hit Super Bowl ad, a Volkswagen spot featuring a boy dressed as Darth Vader, was unique in that it was actually released before the game.

This year, nearly all ad agencies are expected to run previews of their commercials before the Feb. 5 Super Bowl on YouTube and other sites, leading a marketing expert at Washington University in St. Louis to question the wisdom of running a television ad at all.

“Pre-releasing a teaser to a Super Bowl commercial certainly evokes interest for consumers to ‘anticipate’ what is going to come on Super Bowl Sunday, thus improving the quality of ad consumption,” says Seethu Seetharaman, PhD, the W. Patrick McGinnis Professor of Marketing at Olin Business School.

“But the \$3-million-dollar question is whether that Super Bowl commercial will lead to incremental buying,” he says. “Is there any significant return on investment for the \$3 million spent? I doubt it.”

The average cost for a 30-second spot during this year's Super Bowl is \$3.5 million, with some time slots costing as much as \$4 million.

With the continuing trend toward viral commercial releases, Seetharaman advocates companies reconsider traditional television [ads](#) and focus their efforts on the Internet, saving them millions of dollars in the process.

“The return on investment for a viral ad is far greater, since it is much cheaper to get the commercial in front of viewers,” he says. “A viral campaign, at best, produces incremental sales at zero cost, and at worst, produces a lot of social conversation without any incremental sales, like a well-noticed Super Bowl ad would, but without a \$3 million spend,” he says.

Last year’s Volkswagen ad with the child dressed up as Darth Vader has been viewed online more than 50 million times.

Seetharaman says a purely online viral ad campaign, without the actual television Super Bowl component, does not impose any prohibitive costs on a company.

“Water cooler conversation does not a purchase make. Just because a company spends \$3 million or more for a 30-second ad, it does not automatically increase purchase of their product. Viral videos are cheaper to produce and have a much longer shelf life.”

The final purpose of the [Super Bowl](#) ad, Seetharaman says, is to stimulate sales, not to stimulate consumption of online videos.

“Fifty million hits for the Darth Vader ad on YouTube, advertising awards etc., will only give cold comfort to VW if the YouTube hits do not end up selling more VW cars,” he says.

“Take the ‘Will It Blend’ campaign from BlendTec, which was rolled out on YouTube. It not only reached online viewers running in to tens of millions, but more importantly, it increased BlendTec blender sales by 700 percent in the first few months of its rollout.

“That is what an effective promotional campaign must do.”

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

Citation: Super Bowl advertisers should skip TV ads, focus online (2012, January 26) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-01-super-bowl-advertisers-tv-ads.html>

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