

Super Bowl Ads: A better class of rookie moves to big game



Suntrust Banks

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Variety

JANUARY 5, 2016, 7:29 AM

Pepsi, Budweiser and Coca-Cola are among the storied Madison Avenue residents that have over the decades lent support to the Super Bowl. But so are out-of-left-field outfits like GoDaddy, Cash4Gold and SalesGenie.

After seeing a surge of oddball rookie advertisers in recent years, the Super Bowl appears to be drawing a better class of freshmen. Publicly traded [SunTrust Banks Inc.](#), which has its roots in the 1891 founding of Commercial Travelers' Savings Bank in Atlanta, will advertise in the Super Bowl for the first time this February, hoping to catch attention from a broader audience after it has expanded its presence beyond the southeast and mid-Atlantic regions of the U.S., said Susan Somersille Johnson, the company's chief marketing officer. The financial-services company unveils its presence after PayPal Inc., another first-time Super Bowl marketer, announced its efforts in December.

“We are both in financial services, and I don’t think that’s a coincidence,” said Johnson, in an interview. “People are looking for new things from a bank, from any financial-services provider,” including mobile outreach and new ways to interact, she said. “The Super Bowl is a great way to get the message out.”

To be sure, a great many sponsors of Super Bowl 50, slated to be broadcast February 7 from Santa Clara, California on CBS, have yet to divulge their presence. And some may be upstart tech firms or bootstrapping entrepreneurs who will – as others have in the past – sling a brash but amateurish commercial into the mix in hopes of drawing the attention of the gridiron classic’s outside audience. And yet, at least initially, the 2016 ad roster for the event is shaping up to be classier than it has been in some recent outings.

In 2015, 13 marketers who had never before hawked their wares in the Super Bowl joined the game, including toe-fungus drug Jublia, Avocados from Mexico, adhesive-maker Loctite and Mophie, a maker of batteries and power packs for portable devices. The last of that list ran an ad in which God grew angry at mankind due to a dead smartphone battery. In all, rookies accounted for 32% of the advertising in Super Bowl XLIX, according to data from Kantar Media – significantly higher than in recent years.

Rookie advertisers “have been stumbling” in recent years, said George Haley, a professor of marketing at the University of New Haven. “They are coming out right in the middle, because they don’t have the talent in their advertising groups and services that the majors do,” he suggested.

So what has drawn them to the game? Since the dot-com boom of the early 2000s, more fledgling marketers have been armed with cash raised from venture capitalists, leaving them eager to trumpet their name and wares to the world. A recession in 2009 made the sales process more difficult for TV networks, leaving the barrier to entry lower for direct-response advertisers like Cash4Gold, or making TV networks more reliant on brash upstarts like GoDaddy as traditional sponsors like FedEx and General Motors dropped in and out of the event. NBC, which broadcast the game last year, faced hurdles in its sales process as several car companies opted to cease advertising around the event.

The Super Bowl ad roster has experienced more flux in the last two years than it has for about a decade. Of the 39 parent companies that pitched messages in the 2014 game, 22 did not return in 2015, according to Kantar, creating an attrition rate of 56%. This matched the attrition rate from 2013 to 2014 and is the highest level since 2004 to 2005, according to the firm.

Because CBS’ 2016 telecast marks the 50th anniversary of the game, advertisers may feel more pressure to work for prestige, rather than cheap laughs or shock, said Rick Burton, a professor of sport management at Syracuse University. With CBS seeking anywhere from \$4.5 million to more than \$5 million for a 30-second spot, the costs are significant, he added, “That’s a big play,” said Burton. “My guess is the big guys are going to be there.”

Among the sponsors who have acknowledged their 2016 role are Anheuser Busch InBev; [Nestle's Butterfinger](#); BMW's Mini; Colgate; Intuit; Honda; Hyundai; Acura; Mars Inc.'s Skittles and Snickers; [PepsiCo's Mtn Dew and Doritos](#); TurboTax; and WeatherTech. One of last year's frosh, web-developer [Wix.com](#), is set to return for a sophomore attempt.

The blue-chip theory is bolstered by the fact that GoDaddy is taking its leave of the event. In an interview with Variety, Phil Bienert, the company's chief marketing officer, said the web-services concern had maximized its national exposure by advertising in the Super Bowl since 2005, but now needed to use other techniques to sell its wares.

When SunTrust takes to this year's marketing field, it will do so with a cause in mind, said Johnson, the company's marketing chief. SunTrust intends to run a 30-second ad, crafted by agency StrawberryFrog, in the fourth quarter – right at the two-minute warning – prompting viewers to take steps to gain more confidence when it comes to finances. “This will be different, in a way. It's not about a product. It's not a traditional brand ad. It's about awareness of an issue and helping people understand that they don't have to live with this stress” that comes from not being able to manage their money well.”

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