A TV Hail Mary: How the Epstein PSA Aired on Monday Night Football

In most cases, getting your ad onto a national stage—let alone in Monday Night Football—doesn't happen overnight. But for a recent viral PSA from Epstein survivors, it had to.

During this week's Monday Night Football matchup between the Dallas Cowboys and the Las Vegas Raiders, the anti-trafficking group World Without Exploitation aired a PSA featuring several of Jeffrey Epstein's victims advocating for the release of files related to the convicted sex offender.

In the spot, several of the survivors become emotional as they call to "bring the secrets out of the shadows" and show pictures of themselves as children at the ages when they met Epstein.

The ad aired in the A-position during the first ad pod of the fourth quarter, getting prime placement during ABC and ESPN's Monday NFL broadcast, which had been averaging 15.6 million viewers. But getting there wasn't easy.

According to Kern Schireson, chairman and CEO at ad agency Known – which placed the spot and also made the shortlist for ADWEEK's Midsize Agency of the Year – his company became aware of the ad on Saturday, learning that World Without Exploitation had created a PSA with its in-house creative team.

World Without Exploitation was on a mission, looking to get the spot in front of as many people as possible ahead of Tuesday's House vote on a bill to compel the Justice Department to release the Epstein files.

Given that directive, Schireson said Known had "the audacity" to suggest Disney's upcoming Monday Night Football game: a showcase that would reach millions of families across the country, especially now that YouTube TV and Disney have settled their carriage dispute.

With the game a little over a day away, it was a seemingly impossible task. After all, NFL spots are hard to come by, let alone premier positions in Monday Night Football, which would've sold out months ago in the TV upfront.

Even with ample time, it would already be a pricey buy. Monday Night Football ads average well over $500,000 for a 30-second spot, and buyers recently told ADWEEK that NFL ads were up in the high single digits for CPMs (cost per thousand viewers reached) in the upfront.

But this wasn't just any situation, and this wasn't just any ad.

"That was the impact we felt it deserved. That's why we put ourselves on the line and said, 'Well, let's try for this,'" Schireson said. "That kind of 'holy shit' moment that we felt like it warranted."

The original ad was around 70 seconds, so Known needed a final 30-second version, which it had on Sunday night. But even with

a final spot, Disney and the NFL still had to come through.

“You don’t buy football 36 or 24 hours out,” Schireson said, adding that the power of the ad, its message, and the women in it inspired everyone involved to “push the rules to their limit” for standards and ad placement.

Schireson gave credit to Disney, ESPN, ABC, and the NFL for accelerating the spot through clearances and navigating contracts to secure space for it in the game, as well as to World Without Exploitation for getting the final version of the TV-ready ad set for placement, calling the situation “extraordinary.” LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman, a critic of President Donald Trump, also reportedly helped foot the bill.

“I’ve never done a same-day national football buy before,” Schireson said. “But hey, turns out that with the right motivation and alignment, old media can move just as quickly as anything else out there.”

The ad went on to have its “holy shit” moment, leading to coverage from major news outlets and reactions across social media ahead of the House vote, where lawmakers overwhelmingly passed the bill to release the Epstein files.

However, Schireson noted that nothing would’ve happened without the strength of the women in the PSA.

“The power of the message deserves the credit,” Schireson said. “As we’ve seen in other important moments, when people are moved by something, when they become invested in giving voice to something that feels important, a lot can happen.”

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