Does the Length of a Super Bowl Ad Matter?

This year, 30-second commercials in the Super Bowl went for more than $8 million; however, for some brands, that simply wasn't enough time.

Dunkin', Pfizer, T-Mobile, Uber Eats, and TurboTax were some of the brands that opted for 60-second and 90-second ads this year. Jeep even bought two minutes of ad time in the fourth quarter.

But when it comes to ads, does length or storytelling matter more?

ADWEEK spoke with several media buyers and advertising insiders to get their insight on whether longer ads are better and what to consider in the Big Game.

According to Adam Schwartz, svp of investment, sports, Horizon Media, brands should focus on creating commercials that resonate with viewers, and if they feel they need extra time to tell a story that brings people in, they should go for it.

"The longer time you have, the more ability you have to tell that story overall," Schwartz told ADWEEK. "That's why I think you've seen a lot of people buying 60-second spots and sometimes even two-minute creatives in order to really, really tell that story."

Even if advertisers have to shell out more for a longer ad, that can still equate to a good value, depending on what the brand does with the time.

“Longer spots help separate the advertiser from all the other spots and are usually eye-catching and memorable,” Joy Howle, media supervisor at FerebeeLane, said. “For me, the standout spot was Nike’s 60-second ad, whose longer time drew me in.”

It’s worth noting that, even if brands opt for 30-second ads, many put extended cuts online, which is what Disney+ did this year in its “What If” ad, which had a 60-second version released ahead of the Super Bowl and a 30-second version debut during the game.

Kevin Collins, evp, sports marketplace strategy, IPG Mediabrands, explained that advertisers have options if they have solid creative.

“If a brand has the budget and great creative, many are willing to cut two minutes worth of creative to fit a 30-second ad spot,” Collins said. “They can always keep the stock footage and consider buying another 30 or 60. In some cases, I’ve seen advertisers make it a 120-second spot when it’s creative they really love.”

It all comes down to quality, explained Marcy Greenberger, chief investment officer at UM.

“Based on the various published scorecards and trackers rating this year’s ads, a mix of 30 and 60-second spots ranked highest,” Greenberger said. “With a 30-second ad costing upwards of a reported $8 million, a brand willing to pay two to three times that to air a longer spot should feel confident that it’s created an engaging, entertaining, and/or meaningful ad that will resonate with audiences.”

How to get a 30-second ad to resonate

Schwartz said, in order to get the right story across for a shorter spot, more brands have been preparing their creative for years in advance.

“The conversations are starting so much earlier in terms of how people want to approach the Super Bowl, and it’s so competitive from a category standpoint,” Schwartz said. “No one has bought or sold anything yet for next year, but there have been some preliminary conversations depending on the branded category, and that didn’t happen 10 years ago—or it was a very rare occasion.”

While celebrities have always been a big part of Super Bowl ads, Schwartz said he’s noticed an even bigger increase in advertisers using celebrities in their game day spots as companies look to make an impact.

The Hollywood Reporter reported that the number of Super Bowl ads featuring celebrities has increased over the years. Sunday’s game saw a record number, with 57 of 94 product ads starring big-name celebrities, while many had more than one, up 22% from last year.

Brands are also bringing in famous directors and movie producers to create a more theatrical effect.

For instance, WeatherTech, which has been advertising in the Super Bowl for 12 years, took an unexpected route this year and hired Grammy Award-winning filmmaker Joseph Kahn—who has worked with the likes of Taylor Swift, Britney Spears, and Beyoncé—to create a music video-inspired commercial.

Regardless of length or talent, time and time again, marketers repeated that the storytelling is what matters.

“Super Bowl ads live and die by their storytelling,” Martin Blich, executive director, sports and live investment, GroupM US, said. “It’s all about being situated in the right context and making every second count.”

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