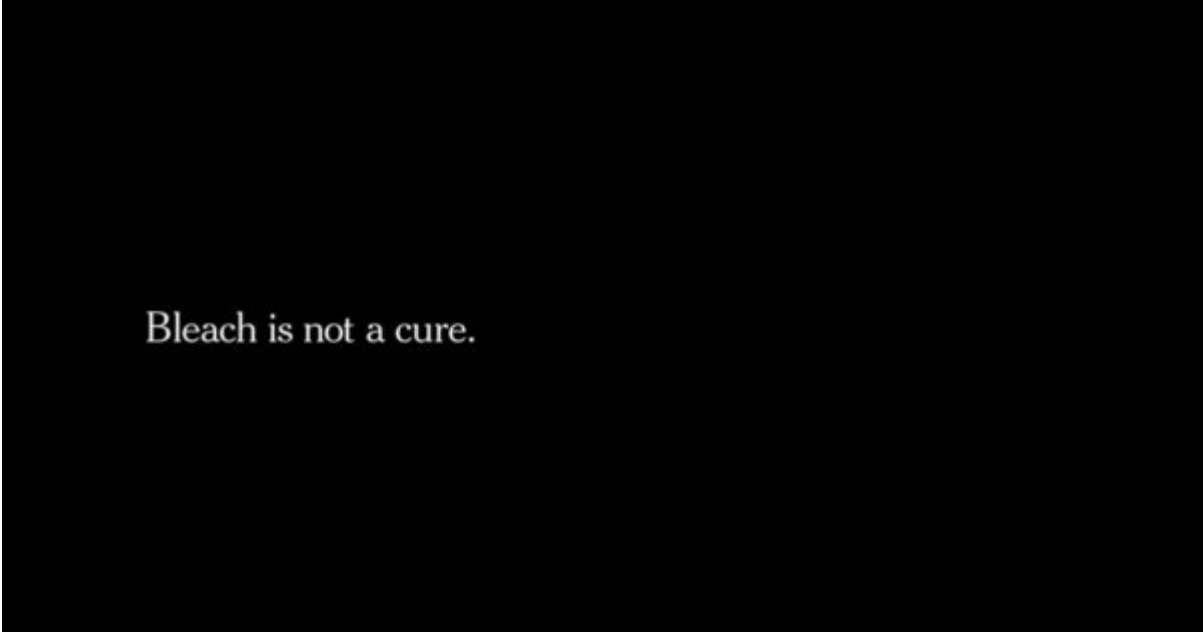


The New York Times Refutes Covid-19 Misinformation in New Ad



Bleach is not a cure.

|
10 hours ago
Key insight:

- Focusing on subscriptions now can ultimately translate into bringing in more advertisers.

It's a sad day when The New York Times has to remind people not to drink bleach, but that's what it's come to.

The Times released a 30-second ad today titled "The Truth Is Essential" that refutes a series of claims related to Covid-19, including President Trump's false insinuation that ingesting disinfectants, such as bleach, could help fight the virus.

Throughout the ad, ominous music crescendoes while the sound of a forcefully hit piano key ushers in each new message like a slideshow.

The ad reads in full:

It's not just a bad flu. It's not a bioweapon. It's not a way to control the population. Bleach is not a cure. It won't just disappear. The virus can be contained. Social distancing helps. We need more testing. The science is vital. We are safer when we are informed. The truth is essential.

The ad, developed in collaboration with creative agency Droga5, will run on television, online and on social media platforms, according to the publisher. Times CMO David Rubin told Adweek the spot will begin running organically on social today and through paid social channels on Thursday before appearing on television this weekend during Saturday Night Live, Meet the Press and CBS Sunday Morning.

Laurie Howell, group creative director at Droga5, said getting the ad's tone right was crucial. "We felt that if we were going to make a piece of work at this sensitive time, it needs to add something or help people," Howell said. "So we looked to make a simple, sober, methodical antidote to the dangerous sea of misinformation out there. No frills, no distractions, just there to reflect what The New York Times is able to give us all: quality journalism [and] verifying the facts to help readers make sense of things in this uncertain moment. We felt there would be comfort and function in that."

"The Truth Is Essential" is the latest in the Times' Cannes Lion-winning "The Truth Is Worth It" campaign, which began in 2017. The Times' most recent entry in that series highlighted The New York Times Magazine's The 1619 Project, featuring actor and singer Janelle Monáe, which ran during the Academy Awards in February. On Monday, Times staff writer Nikole Hannah-Jones won the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary for her essay that ran as part of the project, which looks back on the history of African Americans beginning with the Colonial slave trade.

Publishers have struggled immensely—closing down, laying off and furloughing staffers, and cutting pay for both workers and executives—due to the economic pressures wrought by Covid-19. Through that, many have tried to assert their value in a time when misinformation is so rampant.

Such information has not only originated on online forums, or from foreign actors trying to sow discord, but also from the highest echelons of the U.S. government, including the president, who has routinely touted unproven medical treatments for the disease including bleach, ultraviolet light and hydroxychloroquine.

Before the market opened Wednesday, the Times reported its first quarter earnings, announcing it had seen a 15% decline in ad revenue year-over-year but record-setting subscription numbers. Subscription revenue was up 5.4% as compared to the same quarter last year, and the first three months of 2020 brought in 587,000 net new digital subscriptions across the Times' news products along with NYT Cooking, the crossword and more. Times CEO Mark Thompson said this was the highest number of net new subscriptions in a single quarter.

"The core focus of this campaign is on the mass consumer audience and our core message has been, in every campaign frankly, that quality original reported journalism is really hard to do, and it's expensive," Rubin said. "We don't always say the expensive part, but we show you all that goes into it. And because of that, it needs to be supported by the reader. It needs to be subscribed to."

He noted that a strong subscription base can drive more advertisers to the site, restating a point Thompson and COO Meredith Kopit Levien mentioned on the morning earnings call. "We do believe that long term, our focus on our consumer subscription business will make for a strong advertising business," Rubin said. "We've seen that. What advertisers want is to advertise in places where the audience is very engaged."

In an interview, Rubin emphasized the immense traffic the Times has seen in recent weeks. "More than half of Americans" visited the Times website in March, he said, also noting the record subscription growth. "Those things are happening because of the investment we made in reporting."

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