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## News :: Super Bowl Feedback Not So Super

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Top row, (l to r): Chris Clarke, Cameron Day, Evan Fry; Bottom row, (l to r): Charlie Hopper, Con Williamson

**MIAMI**, February 10, 2010, A SHOOT Staff Report --- While the New Orleans Saints rousing upset of the Indianapolis Colts in Super Bowl XLIV held viewers' interest, whether the commercials did the same is subject to interpretation.

As it has over the years, SHOOT sought such interpretations from creative folk whose agencies did not have any commercials on during the Big Game telecast so as to get an unvarnished, apolitical perspective on 2010's Big Game advertising.

Clearly this is a year when it's hard to figure what chords to strike. Is humor

welcome with an economy still at best in recovery mode? Is there still a place for sentimentality? Does spending \$2.5 to \$3 million on a Super Bowl :30 time slot carry an inherent backlash in light of a high unemployment rate and so many people struggling to make ends meet? Or is this the time to forget about such troubles and enjoy the game and its commercials, to embrace the diversion and have some fun?

Along those lines, how was the Focus on the Family spot received, deemed by some as inappropriate issue advertising for a Super Bowl?

What themes marked this year's crop of Super Sunday commercials? How did this year's field of spots compare to those of recent past Big Games?

Here's a sampling of what our creative respondents had to say:

### **Chris Clarke, CEO, SapientNitro, New York**

Thank goodness the game was great because the advertising was terrible. There were so many misses. The best far and away was the Audi "Green Patrol" commercial. It was charming, witty, engaging, pushed a great message and all linked to the eco-friendly Audi.

A distant second—but I also liked it—was Chevy Chase with the Griswold family back for Homeaway.com. It was fun and it linked back to the product. Both these spots illustrated linkage back to the product in a relevant way, which was a far cry from the rest.

The Doritos spots all missed, Boost was terrible, Dr Pepper offensive, GoDaddy the worst. Overall this Super Bowl was the worst in recent memory.

**Cameron Day, executive creative director, McGarrah/Jessee, Austin, Texas**

First off, I want to say that it's a lot easier to have an opinion than to actually concept and produce a great Super Bowl spot, but that said, I've made a list of hits and misses in my opinion.

What's the deal with Go Daddy? Do they realize how badly they're embarrassing themselves and my profession? They remind me of a drunk who gets hammered in front of his friends and thinks he's funny. They deserve to wake up with an earth-shattering hangover, next to the world's ugliest media bill.

Dr. Pepper attempted to combine three things I love and made me like each of them less: Dr. Pepper, the band Kiss, and the cherry. I don't know who was smoking what, but the good doctor put a bullet through his foot on this one. I was so baffled, so I went back and watched it again. Big mistake. A flawed premise plus-50-year-old flabby rockers saying anything for enough cash equals loss of respect for all parties combined. Ouch. Someone get the Doctor to a decent marketing surgeon quick because he's losing credibility fast.

Which leads me to Coca-Cola, who ran two spots, one with The Simpsons, which I thought was so-so and another one with a guy sleepwalking which I thought was wonderful and reinforced my love of the brand in the same way that the parade spot made me love them last year. "Sleepwalker" was abstract and gorgeously shot and made me proud to drink their sugar water. Good work, Coke.

Teleflora and Cars.com chose to tell the same exact joke as their prior year's spots. I don't tune in to the Super Bowl to see last year's exact game played in different uniforms. I like both companies less for their efforts.

Another strange thing happened--two spots with guys walking around without pants ran back to back, for different products. I think it diminished both spots, which is unfortunate because I really liked the first of the two spots for CareerBuilder.com, but then found myself wondering if the whole "no pants thing" has been done somewhere I hadn't seen it. Perhaps a recycled SNL schtick I missed?

Another unfortunate back-to-back incident involved the aforementioned Dr. Pepper/Kiss shrunken band episode directly followed by a shrunken football player debacle. Can you say borrowed interest? The spots that delved into "ownable territory" or that at least felt consistent and "on brand" were the ones that really resonated for me.

Which brings me to a few great examples of that very point. My two very favorite spots were for VW and Google, with a big fat honorable mention to Dodge. All three ran only one spot, but each had a powerful and "ownable" idea driving them.

Goggle—I loved this spot and it reminded me of how much I appreciate Google for all it does for me, which is particularly important for them now that Bing is flirting with the launch of their national campaign, which I also like quite a bit. I saw this Google ad as a brilliant strategic move. It made me feel a little guilty for considering a new search engine. Ed McCabe once said, "A good ad should make you feel like an asshole for not using the product." This one made me realize that I really like the search engine I'm already with.

Volkswagen—Wow. This must be what won Deutsch the VW business. "They took a universal truth about VW and used it to reengage me in a brand that stopped being relevant to me years ago. A whole new Volkswagen. A whole new game. Thank you, VW. I'm 100% in. Within the "Slug Bug" spot itself, the Stevie Wonder gag could have been truly awful but was played pitch perfect. Nice job, Stevie, Ditto, Deutsch. But the best part of the whole thing plays

out after the commercial has come and gone. When I chased the website down after the spot, I was delighted to meet the alleged creator of the original "slug bug" phenomena. Is he really the inventor of "Slug Bug"? Who cares? I'll be debating it at the water cooler tomorrow. I like that he introduces some new Slug Bug rules. Like that it counts for all VW models. Freakin' brilliant. I can't wait to see where it takes this brand. In fact, it reminds me of the "Let's Motor" movement that Crispin started with Mini, which is ironic, given that VW had to leave Crispin to get to this campaign. Is it as relevant to younger drivers as it is to me who grew up getting and giving slugs with every Beetle sighting? Are you kidding me? Any excuse to slug a friend. And what a brilliant way to get consumers looking for new VW models out there on the road. God, I wish I'd thought of this. Brilliant.

Which leads me to another observation. He who runs the most spots doesn't necessarily win the game. Take Hyundai, for example. They did a bunch of spots this year that had kind of an odd cumulative effect on me. I saw a couple of pretty interesting things, like "Farve Retirement 2020" in support of the 10-year warranty and "Built by Hand," which was visually stunning but didn't really lead to a real tangible benefit. The commercial was visually interesting with hundreds of hands literally carrying the car through the steps of its build, but it became a weak metaphor to me when the voiceover says something to the effect, the cars "almost" feel handmade. Then I saw a couple of far more typical Hyundai spots. What I failed to see was a consistent brand voice from the hodgepodge of what ran. On balance, I think they differentiated themselves much more last year.

Snickers was the first spot that gave me hope that the ad biz might have a decent performance this year. Love the "Betty White/Abe Vigoda" spot.

I liked the "Bridge Out" spot for Budweiser and it made me wish they'd stop trotting out the Clydesdale spots, trying to be all things to all people.

There was a Motorola spot I liked, which proves I'm not a complete technophobe. I thought Flo TV made a brilliant media move by using The Who's "My generation" in an interesting and relevant way in their commercial just prior to the Who's halftime performance. I have a funny feeling that Flo TV might have benefitted greatly by aligning themselves with The Who moments before the halftime performance, which I enjoyed.

I did chase a couple of spots to their websites out of intrigue and was rewarded by one and underwhelmed by the other. Meeting VW's "Sluggo Patterson" was a real treat.

Miller Highlife.com, on the other hand claimed to be "giving up their commercial to help some of their small businesses friends." Cool. I'm intrigued. I wanted to know, for example, what made Loretta's Pralines so gosh darn special and if the "Flat Top" barber was part of a barbershop quartet, given the Baritone register of his voice. What I got on the site were a few shaky low-production films that seemed like they'd had very little thought or good old fashioned craftsmanship put into them. It made me feel like the creatives behind this effort spent all the time and money on the TV spot and the slick website and mailed the other part in. If you're going to give your commercial to the "Little People," invest in making those little people interesting and dimensional characters. Make sure they all have websites and/or Facebook pages prepared for the onslaught of public interest, which I predict will be short-lived at best. This thing felt slick on the front end and half-assed on the backend where it mattered the most if we're being "genuine" here.

It was a great game and I'm glad that a handful of advertisers used the opportunity to great effect.

**Evan Fry, chief creative officer, Victors & Spoils, Boulder, Colo.**

The Bud Light auto tune [with people talking in a Peter Frampton-like squeaky voice]

tickled my funny bone. What I like about Bud Light is they stick with what they do best. They go for broad comedy, and sometimes squeeze in a little more and it can be really good.

The other work that I'd vote for was the Emerald Nuts/Pop Secret spot. They just went for it—but for them going for it didn't mean broad comedy. Instead they went for weird, which can be risky but they did it in a good way.

While those two would be my favorites, I'd also give high marks to the Google spot. The silence worked. You read what was on screen. It was a bit sappy but very solid. It was good proof you don't need celebs and crazy explosions to get your message across.

I'd also give props to the Volkswagen slug bug. And while all the Flo TV spots didn't do it for me—boy, they spent some serious money—I thought the Jim Nantz injury report spot was funny and well written.

My pick for the worst was the Tim Tebow [Focus on the Family] spot. Let's keep that stuff out of paid advertising on the Super Bowl. The Dodge "man's last stand" thing also didn't work. If that's me, shoot me in the face right now. It's an old strategic way of thinking that a vehicle is going to make you happy. I don't like that old strategic math. The same for the Dove men's skin thing. If that's the timeline of man, it's sad. Stick to women, Dove.

I had higher hopes for the Boost "Shuffle." I'm almost 40 and remember the Super Bowl Shuffle. I saw the teasers but didn't care for the spot.

The Coca-Cola spots were solid. I always think they do solid work.

There are the typical spots where they try to slap something on to get your attention but usually it's not a great fit. I felt like the Brett Favre Hyundai spot was in that category. I was hoping Favre would be attached to the brand or product in a way that made more sense. It kind of made sense, but it wasn't integrated all that well. I liked the spot but not enough to give it a big thumbs up.

I missed FedEx. Whether in years past it was Gerry Graf or Eric Silver at the creative helm, that stuff was always work you'd appreciate. They always bring it. I also missed Graf and Silver on Snickers. That spot just wasn't there for me.

The overall crop of commercials certainly wasn't worse than any other year. It may have been better than last year. But there wasn't one commercial that made me stand up, take notice and make me wish that I had done it.

### **Charlie Hopper, principal/creative director, Young & Laramore, Indianapolis**

So much about this year's Super Bowl was the perspective of looking backward, trying to recapture something—starting with the obvious was The Who performing at halftime. But it went much deeper than that. Betty White and Abe Vigoda [Snickers], Larry Bird [McDonald's], a semi-classic Budweiser spot [Clydesdales]. Watching Twitter, you see the kids don't even know Betty White or Abe Vigoda. The ad was entertaining but you have to be of a certain age to appreciate it. It just seemed that there were a lot of attempts in the advertising to capture the glory of the old days. Most everything was a throwback or extending campaigns. There were a lot of old tactics, scraping around trying to find a moment that people will remember. A year from now, no one is going to remember these commercials.

The hardest I laughed at an ad was awhile back for the Walmart spot with the clown stepping on the unicorn. That was the kind of big laugh commercial you used to see on the Super Bowl. Back in the day you had the grand Pepsi stuff. The funniest ads used to be on the Super Bowl but now they're mostly found virally.

The other trend that struck me is the punchline of most every ad being centered on what shallow bores guys are—the beer ads, the Dodge commercial. It's not all that funny anymore. The shared punchline of guys being single minded, small minded and gross makes

the ads all blend together.

Speaking of that, I don't know who was in charge, but how about the sequence of commercials—two in a row showing guys without pants [CareerBuilder followed by Levi's Dockers], the succession of slapping or tackling ads. This weird grouping made the ads all blend together even more.

By contrast, people responded to the silence of the Google ad. It was different from the other ads.

I'd say this year's field of Super Bowl commercials was maybe a tick or two below par. But the problem is that par has been lowered overall. The whole thing just feels old.

### **Con Williamson, chief creative officer, Euro RSCG, New York**

I was in a sports bar in Las Vegas watching the game. Being around the guys a lot of these ads were trying to talk to gives you a different perspective as you watch the commercials. Among the ads that got laughs were the Doritos spot where the mom's date gets smacked by the little kid, the Snickers spot with Betty White, and the Motorola spot with the woman in the hot tub. Most of the Bud Light stuff didn't hit with the group I was with, though the spot with the people stranded on an island got some laughs.

I think the placement of the two spots featuring guys without pants lost something being played back to back. I thought that sequence was a little irresponsible on the network's part.

And the low light was GoDaddy.com The guys in the sports bar didn't even react to it. I went to the website for the "to be continued" and when you get there, it's just more crap.

The commercials overall showed a commitment to going back to making Super Bowl spots. In the past, it seemed the ads were a big waste of money. But now you had more people trying to go big and funny—for Dodge Charger, Cars.com. I also thought the Monster.com ad with the beaver was pretty funny. Ironically the economy may be forcing creatives to step up and go back to the Super Bowl ads that are big in order to try to get viewers to take notice. I felt the overall crop was pretty good this year as compared to other recent years.