

## Advertising Dressed as Content

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The Super Bowl reached up to justify its celebrity this year for one of the few times in the four decades of its existence. This was due in large part to a sensational display of football as sporting finesse and brutality orchestrated into a compelling drama. Not to be outdone, advertisers including Ford, IBM, Chevrolet, Pepsi Cola, Frito Lay and Budweiser put on a display of compelling 'short content' — brilliant fleeting moments of brand and message. All in all, hardly a free moment remained for anyone to visit the refrigerator, make a phone call or simply tune out, that is unless a TiVo or other DVR was at hand. There you have it, TV mission accomplished for viewer, advertiser and service provider alike, with little channel surfing, napping or other forms of private escapism required to fill the time. Beyond that, what occurred gave the viewer a sense of virtual participation in a 'happening event' — a bit too much for many regarding the misguided publicity drive of Janet Jackson and her expose. Later on folks lingered to talk about the fabulous football game to recall and relive what they 'saw'. All in

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*"[For Viacom]...the Super Bowl was a commercial success as well as a slap to its Washington pandering corporate face."*

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all a commercial success with lessons to teach that should warrant our further attention. Herein we take a closer look at media as 'event' and advertising as 'content'.

### DARK SIDE TO OPPORTUNITY

For Viacom, owner of CBS, for some now a house of censorship infamy — for blocking the likes of *The Reagans*, a 60 Minutes Expose of the Tobacco Industry and recently an anti-Bush political advertisement — the Super Bowl was a commercial success as well as a slap to its Washington pandering corporate face. If only Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite were still in the house to call the roll and sound out danger to the media that such behavior represents.

CMS NewsLine

*"Validating the Middle Ground"*



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Nonetheless, the event was in several ways a watershed in the progression of TV as mass media and electronically enabled community. As to the misguided Janet Jackson, Michael Powell, the FCC (and now morals) Commissioner, seemed caught by surprise as Inquisitioner on the verge of a temper tantrum over one bejeweled breast. Are we as a nation having a bit of a meltdown — as greater vulgarity is commercialized, our Dollar crashes, the Budget Deficit bulges and WMD weapons are not to be found? If what our youth get everyday from MTV — Viacom again you say — is the American ‘popular culture’, than some including the French will surely suggest that we have no culture at all. Yet if ‘compelling’ is the name of the TV ratings game, then what we saw at the Super Bowl was close to the mark — including the buxom Janet Jackson.

**B**ut fame is said to be fleeting, so too the value of much vicarious entertainment including exciting media events like the Super Bowl. What remains in place after the curtain falls and the fans depart is TV as a business with its host of technologies and the many complex methods by which it plays its game. This includes the revenue models that nurture the TV enterprise and underpin its economic model and massive infrastructure. Thus, while mostly ignoring all the destabilizing change taking place in form, content and means of delivery, the TV enterprise marches on, at times a bit adrift in a sea of flux and uncertainty. In particular, without TV advertising, as successful attention capturing interruptions that suit

advertisers while tolerated by the public, TV would lose its third economic leg. Yet many TV experts suggest that subscription revenues and pay-per-view income alone are unlikely to sustain the media. Advertising must therefore be reformed to meet the requirements of a brave new world of non-linear TV. To do so it must in part be dressed up as valuable content to be viewed on an elective unforced basis. Interestingly, some of the Super Bowl ads would surely meet this more difficult standard.

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As a first principle, the main thing the public has to offer in lieu of pay for access to TV content is its time and attention. Thus the content owners and service providers are justified in demanding payment in cash or, as a substitute, the viewer’s time and attention. It is as simple as that, while the viewer paying \$40-80 per month for TV access via cable or satellite may feel that he or she has already paid. When the public is able to enjoy the content without paying the piper, many in the TV industry may rightfully feel they have been robbed. Recently the courts ruled that building owners near the Chicago Cubs Stadium will have to pay for the privilege of watching Cub games from their rooftops, as such viewing constitutes a violation of copyright. When advertising is placed into the content stream, some would argue that it must be watched, but they are by reason and legal precedent mistaken. The objective of advertising must be to entice and lure an audience, not to club it into submission — however tempting that may seem to some corporate dilettantes. That which

warrants elective viewing becomes content to the public, representing the essential transformation that must now be achieved by the advertising community.

## MEANS AND METHODS

Advertising can **inform, shock** or **entertain** as it seeks to get the attention of the public. Out of these choices, the easiest to achieve by far is shock — via such elements as profanity, nudity, violence, outrageous behavior, atavistic triggers (such as loud noise) and dramatic action. These are the primal ways for TV advertising to capture and hold viewer attention — mostly by a bunch of cheap and dirty tricks. Still it does not follow that such attention will lead to making a good and lasting impression, as it may instead lead to an unfavorable attitude toward the product or service being advertised in this manner. When the association to a product or service is based on an undesirable visceral response, the consumer may be driven away from the advertised brand.

One of the terms bandied about in the advertising world is targeting — meaning effective targeting. In counterpoint using a shotgun approach to target a sub-population — as in young males at the Super Bowl — may have an inappropriate and unfavorable impact on the rest of the viewing population — read children and adults. To a degree, subjecting a mass audience to advertising that is meant primarily for a subgroup can have a very negative impact, as it may be taken as inappropriate and even as trespassing. At the same time the targeted population may respond favorably to advertising that

panders to its biases and idiosyncratic attitudes and behavior. This is certainly the case when it comes to the frenzied pre-mating ritual of the young adult population, living and experiencing their social surroundings in hot blood. For the young male the tribal ritual of gaining social acceptance by participating in group rites of passage makes him an easy target for advertising based on action, violence, profanity and sexual permissiveness. Unfortunately, such advertising can have negative long-term consequences for the individual and the society. Using freedom of speech as a justification for shock type of advertising is legally incorrect and unlikely to stand the test of time. After all each person's rights end at the tip of everyone else's nose — as when the line is crossed with regard to what is socially acceptable within the mores of a given society.

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*“When an ad is selected for attention it is after all transformed into desirable short content.”*

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These observations bring us logically back to the three main choices the advertiser has to

reach an audience: to inform, to shock or to entertain. As the shock component must now be handled with greater care, a greater focus on informing and entertaining the public may provide the better overall result. In today's new world of nonlinear TV where the DVD, DVR and VOD systems allow the viewer greater control to view content in a time-is-elastic mode, it follows that shock advertising is destined to lose out. After all, given the choice, many viewers may choose to avoid the shock treatment and prefer greater commercial or entertainment value from the advertising they choose to attend. When an ad is selected for attention it is after all transformed into desirable short content.

Thus the nonlinear TV advertising model comes closer to the classic magazine advertising paradigm, wherein the reader scrutinizes a few ads that really gets his or her scrutiny. Here the chosen few may create the deep and lasting impression the advertiser is truly seeking. Is this better or worse than the shock 'em and tag 'em sex, violence, profanity and dramatic action way of doing advertising? Perhaps not, but as the non-linear TV mode is now upon us elective advertising that informs or entertains may be the better way to go.

As change is generally a source of concern, there is within the advertising community a good deal of moaning and groaning and wringing of hands. The sky is falling, the sky is falling can be heard — as excessive sex, violence, profanity and dramatic action may no longer be tolerated. Can you hear us lords of Viacom? How is one to earn a living when these useful tools of the trade are eviscerated from the TV advertising system? Not to worry, the sky is not falling — it is simply time for the ad agencies to come to grips with the coming reality. What indeed is the true nature of TV advertising viewing, and what is one to make of it? The answer is so simple, and the solution so obvious that some leading pundits, industry seers and advertising community leaders may still be missing the point. Technology as it has so often done in the past has changed the power equation, i.e. the balance of power between the commercial side and the consumer side has shifted to such a degree that some of the old tricks will not work any longer. Too bad, too sad. The solution is to redraw the script nearer to the heart's desire.

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## A POWERFUL INSIGHT

In his insightful book *The Anatomy of Power*, John Kenneth Galbraith, professor emeritus at Harvard University analyzed the sources of power and the ways it can be applied. In so doing he provides the framework within which to resolve the nonlinear TV advertising puzzle. Galbraith reminds us that there are only three major ways of exercising power. They are based on what he calls the three Cs: Conditioning, Compensation and Condign (punishment). While conditioning in the

form of propaganda and indoctrination are up to a point acceptable to the public; and compensation in the form of cash, compliments and give-aways is always popular; punishment can only be doled out when one has the power

to do so. With linear TV, especially prior to the remote control and the VCR, the public was the hapless victim of the TV media and punishment in the form of endless mindless shockwaves of advertising was unmercifully forced upon the powerless viewer. Now with DVD, DVR and VOD to empower non-linear TV, the power equation has been altered. Therefore condign action on the part of the TV media and its advertisers will likely come face to face with time shifting counter action on the part of the viewers. Too bad, too sad, so why not kiss and make up — but how?

Once again Galbraith has the answer as he reminds his readers that there are only three primary sources of power, which he describes as POP: Property, Organization and Personality. By property he means wealth and the things wealth can acquire such as broadcast rights, fibre networks,

patents, copyrights and system hardware and software. By organization he means skilled people and systems along with the administrative and managerial arts and associated software. By personality he means the persuasive skills of a Will Rogers, Bob Hope or even a George Bush or Bill Clinton. Thus, when two sides face each other in a contest of will and means they each use their POP via their CCC alternatives to gain the upper hand. Up until recently the TV broadcasters, cable MSOs and satellite service providers had all the POP they needed to press their shock advertising upon a POP light public. Especially when it came to the property and organization elements of POP embodied in the form of their powerful commercial houses such as CBS, Comcast and DirecTV. But now that has all changed as new technology has given the viewer population of consumers a lot of P for property in the form of: multi-media PCs, DVD recorders, CD players, home entertainment centers, home networking, IPGs, iTV, digital video recorders — DVR, digital cameras, VOD and many more choices.

Thus the balance of power has been dramatically altered in the past few years. Sorry is all that can be said to the past abusers of media power in advertising, as the condign exercise of POP will now be met by even more POP in the hands viewers — for those who fail to mend their ways. No need to moan and groan and wring hands, condign as a method will no longer succeed so one and all must get over it. As to the way forward, opening one's mind to a change in the balance of power and how CCC methods may be employed is the only way to go.

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*“Ergo, all must back away from the excessive use of shock advertising: as in Janet Jackson flashing body parts...”*

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Ergo, all must back away from the excessive use of shock advertising: as in Janet Jackson flashing body parts, male rockers misplacing their hands and the use of profanity, violence, perversion and excessive drama to make a point — as in females on reality shows swallowing live worms. The use of condign methods is generally over as a way of exercising one's POP. When it comes to the three primary forms of advertising: to inform, to shock and to entertain as in ISE, it is best to minimized S and go with I and E to once again capture the attention of the audience with a good advertising impression. The test is simple, play for the straight and narrow on nonlinear TV — or fail.

For those who may feel that we have been describing a novel situation that is unique to the media industry and its advertising arm, that is simply not the case. The very same transformation took place seventy-five years or so ago in the labor market. Up until then, labor organization, labor laws and job markets were such that condign was the name of the game when it came to management. The managerial style of the Henry Fords and Andrew Carnegies was to threaten, fine, punish and fire any employee who did not tow the line. These chaps had lots of POP and condign was mainly the name of their game. Think of the Christmas Story, where the rich business owner torments and frightens a poor employee and his family into submission at Christmas time — no savory dinner for them.

Then of necessity came the trade unions and new labor laws and much employer



abuse was disallowed. Many managers of the day were heard to moan and groan and wring their hands, proclaiming that the sky was falling and that American business could not prosper if the boss could not have his way by force. Guess what, it turned out that substituting greater compensation and conditioning more than made up for the lack of condign or abuse as a means of exercising corporate POP. We may observe that in CCC are all the necessary means to effectively exercise one's power — with little focus on punishment. President Teddy Roosevelt said it best when he said: "Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far." Today at every MBA program they teach the use of compensation and conditioning (training) as the best ways to motivate employees — there is little talk of bluster, threat, fines and the like in American labor management these days. So the world changed and so did the management style, yet management is still in charge — with 401Ks, stock options, bonuses, overtime pay and a friendly pat on the back and a 'well done' substituting for abuse. Yet management still has the POP and all the CCC needed to exercise real power.

**B**y tuning in to the clear thinking of Galbraith's analysis we may spy the light at the end of the advertising tunnel: ads that inform, that are far friendlier in terms of shock value and that entertain, presented as compelling short content. How is this to be integrated into the hard-bitten TV world of dog-eat-dog advertising and commerce? The following overview of advertising as appealing and compelling

content is but an abbreviated glance at the possible solution space. The elements described herein are neither mutually exclusive nor collectively exhaustive of the space, but may suffice to prod the reader's own point of view. The real answers will only come as industry practitioners learn by trial and error to employ the right combinations of the following elements in creative and practical ways that appeal to the public while satisfying the needs of the advertisers.

**ITV** — For the TV advertising community part of the answer will come in the form of interactive or iTV advertising. OpenTV, NDS, Digeo and the TV Guide, are but a few of the leading service providers in the interactive TV space. The iTV advertising idea is very simple, to employ the two-way TV service provider pipe to get the message across in a better way. As in using stored

content on a hard drive in the Set-top Box or at the head-end along with sophisticated software, to enable a viewer to examine a product or service in a fun, lean-forward, interactive mode. Contrary to popular opinion, iTV is far

from dead, and only in the infancy of its incarnation into a powerhouse media force. When a viewer is able to consider a product or service beyond a primitive advertising message and drill down to the specifics, then a deeper and more lasting impression is likely. Such an advertising experience can be useful, powerful and satisfying — in other words it can work for both parties.

**Short Content** — For the TV advertising community part of the solution will come

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*"How is this to be integrated into the hard-bitten TV world of dog-eat-dog advertising and commerce?"*

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in the use of 'short content' advertising. Such 'Infotainment' as may be seen on TiVo, where the product or service, say BMW, is presented within the context of an event or entertainment experience to be appreciated. As it is now ski season, we may take as an example an imaginary 'short content' video of dramatic skiing in the wild Rocky Mountains of Western Canada. Within this compelling content part of the story line may be about the danger of accidentally crashing into a tree and the subsequent risk of a head injury. What a fitting opportunity to examine the pros and cons of ski helmet features, functions and benefits, as in the advantages of a durable hi tech Bell ski helmet. Here the advertising does indeed inform, shock (a little) and entertain. The viewer, lured to pay attention will have received a deep impression concerning the merits of Bell ski safety equipment. For these reasons, advertising of this sort is far less likely to be tuned out or fast-forwarded, and far more likely to achieve its purpose.

**Embedding** — For nonlinear TV advertising part of the answer may come in the practice, employed in many of the Hollywood movies of the 30s and 40s, of embedding products right into the scene of action. This works because when someone is relaxing watching a show or a movie they are generally off their guard. Therefore, viewing a product or service within entertainment and its context may penetrate a viewer's consciousness with little resistance. Within this setting the viewer is likely to be accepting of what he or she sees. Thus the Jack Daniels bottle, the Tylenol, the Polo sweater or the

Cadillac SUV easily blend in to be sublimely 'accepted'. Bingo! This form of advertising may only be 'waving of the flag' as a basic brand message; yet done intelligently this approach can still have a useful impact. There is little doubt that cigarette smoking and the drinking of martinis in America increased by leaps and bounds as a result of seeing the likes of Elizabeth Taylor and John Wayne in the act. Transfer propaganda and the use of celebrity in conjunction with embedding can be very powerful. How else could a two-hour infomercial for the Mini Cooper, also known as *The Italian Job*, be accepted if not for Charlize Theron at the wheel? Once again, the product or

service is taken in as part of the content of the program and accepted as part of the greater good.

**New Metrics** — For TV advertising part of the solution within nonlinear TV lies in new

metrics by which to measure what is going on at the client end. Here we may be beating an old drum, but the development of better metrics is surely needed to make TV advertising effective in a time-shifted TV world. In truth many advertisers have for many years felt that they are victims of a shell game they cannot avoid. Yet, in the absence of truly effective metrics, that gauge what is actually being viewed and by whom, who is to say whether any value has been achieved for the advertiser by a given advertisement to a particular audience. The sad tale of old Peals Beer, now long bankrupt, has been repeated many times yet its message remains compelling, as inappropriate advertising contributed mightily to the company going out of

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business. Yet in the absence of effective metrics, no one knew what was happening before it was too late.

**Slicing and Dicing** — For the TV advertising community part of the answer is in effectively slicing and dicing content. The idea of the 30-minute and 60-minute TV program cannot be expected to survive in its present form in a non-linear time shifting technology enabled world of consumer behavior. Within the busy lives of active multi-tasking people short content in the form of 1,2,3,5,10,15,20 minute time slices may gain popularity. In that case, the slicing and dicing of existing and new content to extract appealing short segments and attractive scenes may come into vogue. To the extent that current copyright laws and new legislation on copyright and intellectual property allow, inserting advertisement into such content may become an important source of new revenue. This is particularly true for TV that is being watched on a PDA, cell phone, portable PC or in the back seat of an automobile.

**Revenue Models** — Part of the answer is in new revenue sources and new revenue models. For most of the history of television, the 30-second spot ad, inserted on national TV or in local TV broadcasts and cable shows, was the norm. For example, a 30-second spot ad during the Super Bowl cost some \$2.3 million. In order to accommodate short content, time shifting and other forms of TV viewing new revenue models will be needed. The real resistance to such change is coming mostly from the agencies — among whom many talk of change, while few are actually prepared for the new

advertising modes and revenue models that will be required.

**Small Audience Ads** — Part of the answer is advertising to small target audiences on fractionated channels. Historically advertisers have fallen victim to ‘the easy way out’ approach of ad agencies and media buyers — meaning a mass audience of at least several million viewers or don’t buy into the program. This approach worked well for the Jerry Lester Show some fifty years ago when only five TV channels existed, and even for the Johnny Carson Show twenty years ago when thirty channels was the norm. No more, in the hundred channel world of today and the five hundred channel world of tomorrow, the viewing population is segmented down to

hundreds of thousands or even fewer viewers. Advertising to such a fragmented population distribution is harder, but this segmentation also allows far better targeting of the right audience for specific products

and services such as flight insurance, skis and tennis rackets.

**Shopper’s Corner** — For TV advertising in the future a DVR or VOD shopper’s corner may be part of the answer. It no longer follows that any advertising to be viewed is already in the stream as the programming is sent down by satellite, or on the cable fibre or through the air. In the new paradigm, the advertising may well be stored and waiting on a hard drive in the viewer’s Set-top Box or on a server at a head-end. Under these circumstances the viewer and his or her demographic information or preferences may dictate which specific ad is placed in passing into

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*“In order to accommodate short content, time shifting and other forms of TV viewing new revenue models will be needed.”*

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the content stream as it is being watched. This of course fractionates the viewing population once more, resulting in smaller audiences for individual ads. It also requires detailed metrics to keep track of what is actually being watched and by whom. CPMs and impression aggregation can then be computed ex post facto.

### **INCA Advertising** — In Context Advertising will also provide a large part

of the answer and much greater value to the advertiser and greater satisfaction to the public. That is the case due to the fact that many a remote control active viewer tunes out or away when advertising that does not fit the show he or she is watching cuts in. In counter point when an ad is in context with a show or program, a viewer is far more likely to stay locked into the ad when it starts. This INCA advertising approach is a powerful way to achieve successful advertising because it respects the viewer while introducing the commercial message in a way that informs without a sense of intruding. Of course INCA as an approach to more effective advertising requires additional effort and more technology, but the result is dramatic as the viewer's time and privacy is honored while the ad is being absorbed. In a time-shifted nonlinear TV world, out of context advertising will be shifted away and fail to gain an audience.

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*"This INCA advertising approach is a powerful way to achieve successful advertising because it respects the viewer while introducing the commercial message..."*

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tumbling jumble of confusion, it is time to go back to first principles. As in avoiding the wedging-in of out of context shock advertising within linear TV that will no longer work. Face it; this approach has now been forced to the point of failure. Therefore, more of the same will not do — as the audience is clicking away reflexively — the Pavlovian dog is now more or less fully trained. As a consequence the out of context lengthy pod of advertising represents a lost cause

knowledgeable advertisers will want to avoid. The audience that remains to actually view such advertising pods is hardly the audience the advertisers want to impress with their message — those who remain will soon be mostly the children, the inebriated, the sleepy, the old, and the like — hardly a target demographic.

As to media programming, what compels an audience best is a sense of participation in a happening, an event or a destination — like the Academy Awards, the Super Bowl and the Presidential Election. Within such compelling events, advertising as useful or entertaining content must also be achieved. When forms of acceptable advertising — think INCA — are melded into a media event in an in-context manner, we have a compelling winning combination. Take that to the bank, and tell them we told you so.

### **ADVERTISING AS CONTENT WITHIN MEDIA AS EVENT**

**W**hen the dynamics of technological change make an established business such as TV advertising appear to be a rolling

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(Leo Willner and Greg Kalsow contributed to this issue. In order to discuss any of these points with the authors, please e-mail them at: leo@ad-assoc.com and greg@ad-assoc.com)

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## **KALSOW'S BACK-CHANNEL: “Validating the Middle Ground”**

■ Last month we reported on the dire warnings concerning Microsoft and the hackers on its Windows tail described in the January 2004 issue of PC World. The point was then and is now is that the very nearness of Microsoft to the entertainment and communications sectors, as in cable set top boxes and middleware for TV, is bringing its besieged hacked and patched Windows world ever closer to the consumer electronics community of fun, games and entertainment. In the February 9, 2004 issue of InfoWorld in an Editor’s Letter by Steve Fox its Editor in Chief entitled *When Fear is Justified*, a clarion call regarding the present and growing danger to Web applications and the failure of standard firewalls was sounded. Just this week Microsoft announced another major failure found in its Windows operating system, with a new patch on the way. While it is long past high noon to be aware of these dangers, is it also time to consider Linux?

■ Comcast as Big Brother and chief media takeover artist, what a surprise. Who would expect that the cherubic innocent face of Brian Roberts, CEO of Comcast, would mask the dark intentions of a once benign little cable operation out of the darkest part of the Old South? Tupelo, Mississippi the former headquarters town of the Klu Klux Klan and also the birthplace of the Robert’s empire — what an odd coincidence. After engorging itself on the entrails of AT&T, formerly the largest and perhaps greatest corporation in all the world, it seems that

the dessert is to be Mickey Mouse and the gang at Disney. The fact that Michael Eisner has enriched himself while carelessly damaging the image and reputation of Disney, and while ESPN has become Genghis Khan to cable TV, who in their right mind would support Disney and ABC becoming more fodder in the megalomaniac house that Comcast has become? Perhaps Michael Powell will finally display the fact that his famous genes were not misplaced, and put a stop to this.

■ TV advertising at the Super Bowl broke all sorts of records for cost, form and message. \$2.3 million per 30-second spot was surely a record, as were the scores of commercials displayed at such a usurious rate. As to the form and content of the commercials, some were indeed in somewhat bad taste while many others were outrageously good and funny. Our favorite was the little donkey that auditioned to be a Budweiser Clydesdale to lead its giant beer wagon train into our souls – its quixotic quest for recognition and acceptance plucked all the right heartstrings and reverberated positive feelings toward the brand. Budweiser did a great job with other of its ads as did Ford, GM, VISA and others. All in all, it was a dramatic display of compelling advertising at a great big live event. Nonetheless we should not mistake this genre with the type of advertising that will work best in the future in a nonlinear time-shifting TV world. Thus what we all saw and enjoyed was more of a closing act on a past now receding over the horizon, than an image of the future of TV advertising.

[Your mileage may vary. –RGK]

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