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Amateurs' ad ideas come up winners

By Laura Petrecca

Here's some news that Madison Avenue admakers may not want to hear: The average consumer seems to know a few things about making ads that resonate with fellow consumers.

Super Bowl ads conceived by amateurs took three of the top six slots in a survey of which of the game's commercials gave the biggest boost to viewers' opinion of the brand. The online poll of 6,063 people after the game will be released today by IAG Research.

Three consumer-conceived commercials — two promoting Frito-Lay's Doritos that were shot by amateurs and one for the National Football League that was professionally shot but based on a fan's idea — were among the top-ranked ads for "greatly" or "somewhat" boosting viewers' positive feelings for the advertised product:

- A Doritos ad that showed a supermarket cashier getting frisky with a shopper was 67% more effective than the average big game ad in improving viewer opinion of the product advertised. That result was good for third on the IAG list.
- An NFL ad showing fans' sorrow about the season's end was 57% more effective, and ranked fourth.
- A Doritos ad that showed a young driver flirting with a girl was 45% more effective than the average ad and ranked sixth.

Ad ideas from professionals for commercials for Blockbuster and Anheuser-Busch's Budweiser brand did snag the first two slots in the survey. An ad for Cadbury Schweppes' Snapple took fifth.

The success of both the best amateur and top professional ideas came from "finding a way to connect (with the consumer) — whether it's through emotions or humor — that's viewed as real," says IAG co-founder Alan Gould.

In the ads, neither Doritos nor the NFL explicitly labeled the content as from consumers. But both heavily hyped their consumer contests before the game.

Gould says there's no single formula for why certain ads rose to the top, but he notes that Doritos might have been helped by its extensive pregame publicity to get the word out that its ads would be consumer videos that won online voting.

Doritos mounted an online campaign to encourage consumers to upload potential ads at CrashtheSuperBowl.com. It received more than 1,000 entries.

The NFL's online and TV promotions helped to encourage more than 1,700 fans to show up at stadium events to pitch their Super Bowl ad ideas.

And efforts to see that viewers heard that the ads were consumer-conceived likely raised viewer opinion, says Michael Solomon, a consumer behavior expert and author of *Conquering Consumerspace*.

Consumer-created ads are often successful because they "don't have that stigma of being a corporate creation," he says. An ad "immediately gets a leg up in terms of credibility" if viewers know that the ad comes from a consumer, rather than a professional marketing department.

When consumers watch an ad, they know the aim is to persuade them, "So they try to think of reasons why they shouldn't be persuaded," he says. "That's why messages that aren't easily identified as paid advertising are generally more effective."