



POSTED IN LEGAL MARKETING

---

## Superbowl Commercials - The Best of 2016

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON FEBRUARY 8, 2016

Picture, if you will, the Staples commercials that aired a few years ago, with the parents sailing through the aisles as they got ready for their kids to go back to school as “It’s the most wonderful time of the year” played jubilantly in the background. For me, that’s what Superbowl commercials are like.

While football is all right (these days, I’d much prefer to watch the [Six Nations](#), where it seems that the men are men), to me, the Superbowl is really about the ads. If a company is going to spend up to \$5 million for 30 seconds of ad time (yes, you read that right), then they should really be bringing their A game to the ad game.

Unfortunately, I’d have to say that this year overall was a bit of a letdown. While I did have some standouts and so will be able to do a “best of” as well as my “good, bad and ugly,” in general, the commercials were at best, mediocre. And that’s just not okay.

Companies (and firms, this goes for you, too): if you’re going to be investing in a marketing project, invest in it. Don’t spend the money on the advertising dollars, only to go cheap on the ad itself. Some of the ads were misses for me, but at least I could tell that the agencies tried. Most of them felt like an afterthought. And I see more and more of that in legal marketing these days too – we have some brilliant and talented people in our industry, who are, unfortunately, being asked to do more and more and are spread very thin. As a result, there’s less and less creativity being seen because there’s only so much time in the day.

But I’d love to see more from all of us. Bring back the days of thoughtful, smart marketing that gets people excited about what they’re going to see. We don’t need the budgets of these big companies to learn and apply the lessons that their commercials can teach us!

So with that in mind, let's take a look at my five favorites from this year's crop of Superbowl ads – along with a couple of Honorable Mentions:

## Prius: The Longest Chase

The All-New 2016 Toyota Prius | The Longest Ch...  



I loved this commercial – it's a clever take on the idea that a Prius, as a hybrid, would of course get great gas mileage. We've already seen commercials about road trips be overdone, so this is a reimagined version. Importantly for me though, the humor in the commercial underwrites the features of the car – it gets great gas mileage, it's roomy, it handles well, it has a backup camera. It's not just funny for funny's sake, which is the fate of a lot of Superbowl spots.

Some people got worked up that it glorifies bank robbers, but I hope that we all can take this with a grain of salt and know that it's NOT actually doing that. But in case you're in that camp, what really sold it for me was the follow up spot at the very end of the Superbowl...where the police also get Priuses:



The two spots together are really brilliant.

What can lawyers and law firms take away from these ads?

- When marketing your services, don't be gimmicky for the sake of it. Use your marketing to make your message memorable. That's the point.
- Get creative: how can you reimagine the same message in a new way? Prius takes the same thing we've heard over and over again (the great gas mileage) and uses a car chase to communicate it, instead of the overdone road trip.
- Get people to root for you: Prius manages to get us to root for both the bank robbers and the police in these ads, without ever making either the "bad guy" It's just funny and light-hearted all around (which, by the way, is a Prius characteristic, so that's also good brand messaging right there). How can you use your marketing to get people to root for you and your firm?

## Honda: A New Truck to Love



Car commercials are going to be a theme for me this Superbowl ad season, as four of my top five favorites are cars. Here's another brilliant one, this time from Honda.

The one downside of this commercial is that it could really be any truck that the sheep are selling – it happens to be the Honda Ridgeline, and the hook is that there's truck bed acoustics, which is, of course, related to the ad, so that's all great. But it's not interwoven well into the fabric of the commercial that it's a Honda in any way. But aside from that, I just love it. Sheep singing an epic Queen song secretly in the field as the farmer comes and goes? What's not to love?

Lessons for lawyers and law firms:

- Catch people's attention with something unusual: As the commercial begins, you mentally think "Ah yes, another typical car commercial about a truck." But then, a sheep starts to sing and that snaps your brain to attention. It's a little bit weird, and funny, and the sheep are quite good singers (not really, but you know what I mean), so it catches and keeps your attention for the full ad. In an information age where we're being bombarded with images and messages all the time, and it's so incredibly easy to tune them out that we almost do it as a matter of course, how can you catch people's attention and keep it long enough to communicate what you want them to know (AND get them to remember it)?
- Always, always, always use sheep singing Queen songs. A lesson for all of us.

## Jeep: Portraits



I'm a photographer, so I was a sucker for this ad from the first moment, simply because it's just beautiful. But it's also incredibly well done. Part of me did hope that this was an ad for Nikon or Canon, but that's pretty well unheard of during the Superbowl (although with some of the brands advertising this year, I guess nothing would have surprised me). But right away, I knew it was a Jeep ad, and that's part of why the messaging was so good, and why it gets top billing from me.

Jeep is celebrating their 75th anniversary, and through these photos, they share every piece of their brand message – their ruggedness, their history, their place in time, their ability to trek across all kind of terrain, and yet they also make it a message about people, and not cars. They reinforce the brand through inserting photos of jeeps through the years every so often throughout the montage, but it's subtle and not overdone. They make the viewer part of the message, part of the history, part of the brand, and by the end, you're feeling connected to Jeep. Plus, it's aesthetically beautiful.

What can lawyers and law firms learn from this?

- It's about the connection: Marketing doesn't have to be funny, but it does have to resonate. How can you connect with your audience with your message? I've never owned a Jeep, but I felt connected to them by the end of this ad, and that's a powerful thing. How can you get potential clients and clients to feel connected to you?
- It's about the audience: Their tagline at the end is "We don't make Jeep: You do." Wow. That is the truth, right there. No matter what goes into the "sausage-making" as we all like to say, in the

end, we're all nothing without our clients. That's who makes us who we are. Jeep recognizes that so beautifully in their ads – both this one, and the other one that they did for the Superbowl. Jeep can make all the cars that they want, but if no one drives in them or rides in them, they don't mean anything. Jeep hasn't forgotten that. They even take it a step further, inviting everyone to share their own story with Jeep, using the hashtag “#MyJeepStory” on social media – that's a great way to keep the conversation going, to collect stories about Jeep owners and passengers and their adventures, and to [hopefully] use those stories in future marketing initiatives. How could you translate your own clients' stories with you and your firm similarly?

## Colgate #EveryDropCounts

Colgate #EveryDropCounts



This is a powerful ad, which barely mentions the brand at all, and that's part of what's so smart about it.

Colgate basically does a commercial about an issue that is related to the use of their product – the wasting of water. They point out, rather succinctly, and yet in a way that gives you an emotional gut punch, that running the water while you brush your teeth wastes more water than some people have in a week. If that doesn't make you stop and think, I'm not sure what will.

The only nod to their brand is the stripe of toothpaste on the brush at the very beginning, and the mention of Colgate at the very end. Slick and well-done.

What I like about this ad is that they're using their platform to address something that's important – wasting water. They're also using it as a call to action, in two ways: first, asking you to turn off the water while you're brushing and second, to look at their hashtag #everydropcounts, which teaches you about being a better global citizen (PS, it's also doing wonders for those global citizens marketing Colgate for them at the same time).

What can lawyers and law firms learn from this?

- Marketing doesn't always have to be about you directly: You can use the opportunity to be a good citizen and highlight a practice area or client or community work that you or your firm does while only tangentially mentioning the firm. You may be raising issues or awareness for subjects or causes that wouldn't have the funding to get attention otherwise, which just also happen to be related to something that you do in the way of legal work. The main purpose is, of course, to highlight the important issue at hand, but there is the secondary benefit of raising awareness of your firm and brand.
- If advocacy is something that's important to you as a firm or lawyer, then this is an excellent way to communicate that – it's the old adage of showing being far better than telling. Don't tell people that you do good work; show them the good work that you do. You don't have to take out an expensive ad campaign for this, but consider using your firm's social media presence to highlight your clients and their causes, or to act as pro bono advertising for the causes that you believe in. Find ways to not only get involved, but also to highlight those organizations and the things that they stand for to the wider community, so that there is a wider benefit to them than just your involvement.

## MINI: #DefyLabels

MINI USA | #DefyLabels TV Spot



In the interest of full disclosure, I should mention that I used to own a MINI Cooper, so I was predisposed to love this commercial. But I do love it.

MINI, who had always said that they wouldn't advertise, has developed an ad based on all of the things that people joke about their cars. "This is a chick car." "This is a cute car." "This is a singly unprofessional car."

And using strong, particularly-chosen, label-defying people in the spot, they basically poke fun at and reject each of those “labels” with the message being to “Defy Labels,” finishing with Harvey Keitel telling us that “This car doesn’t care what you call it.” (And neither do its drivers)

It’s great, because it fits right in with MINI’s messaging – it doesn’t fit into a mold, it doesn’t conform to any standards, and whatever people say about it, the people that like it know the truth about it, and don’t care about the rest.

What’s the lesson for lawyers and law firms?

- Know your message and live it: Your brand is who you are. There are things that we aspire to be, and strengths we want to play to – we want to be the best, the smartest, the toughest, etc. But what is your \*thing\*? That’s your brand. I’ve heard more and more in recent months that people have seen a firm say that they’re one thing in their messaging, but their experience with the firm hasn’t borne that out. That’s what happens when the brand doesn’t match the marketing. When I first started with the ILN, I did a tremendous amount of research to find out what it was that set us apart. There are things I’d like to be able to say about us, and in many cases, those things would be true – we’re global, we’re responsive, we’re mid-sized. But I wanted to know what made us different, and what the one thing was that all of our lawyers thought about when they thought about the ILN. And almost every single person came back with the same answer – the relationships. Over and over again, that’s what the ILN represented to them. So that’s what we live in our marketing and our branding – it’s about the relationships. When you live your messaging, it’s easy, because you never have to worry that someone will have an inauthentic experience. That’s what MINI is doing here, and we can all do that as lawyers and law firms.
- Don’t be afraid to push back: MINI doesn’t let other people define them. They are a strong little car, and they know it. People think they’re not fast – but they won so many rally races that they’re no longer allowed to compete because it wasn’t a fair competition. So when you know who you are, don’t let someone else tell you who you’re not. Sometimes, pushing back against stereotypes, when you know them to be untrue, can be a great marketing tactic, as you can see in MINI’s spot.

## Honorable Mentions

And of course, there were honorable mentions – we’ll get to the “good” commercials later this week, but there were a couple that almost made it into my great list, and so deserve an honorable mention:

- Walken Closet: This one would have been perfect had they used a color other than white for the car. They go on and on about living a beige life, and then show a white car? Why not red? The point of the commercial is not to “blend in,” but how better to blend in than to drive a white car, like the majority of people on the road? Sorry, Kia, it’s not enough to drive your car. It needs to



be a brighter colored version of your car.

- Hyundai: Ryanville: So, while it's maybe more than mildly offensive that Hyundai is saying women drivers need a car that doesn't get distracted by good looking men, I did chuckle over the idea of a world where all of the men were suddenly Ryan Reynolds. If it wasn't sexist, maybe it would have gotten top marks, but honorable mention for effort (and Ryan Reynolds)!
- Wiener Stampede: Having two basset hounds myself, I do love long dogs, so I can't resist a commercial with dachshunds in it. So a commercial with dachshunds dressed as hot dogs? Running towards hot dog condiments? With "I Can't Live" playing to underscore the natural pairing of hot dogs and condiments? Yep, it's perfect. It's a little weird, which is the only thing that keeps it at Honorable Mention levels, but it still holds a special place in my heart. Go watch it immediately to cheer yourself up.

I'll be back tomorrow with my list of "good" commercials before we get into the bad and ugly (oh, there were so many ugly ones). But in the meantime, weigh in with your favorites! What were the hits and misses for you?