

The Super Bowl: the Oscars of advertising

By  Danette Breitenbach

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This past Sunday, 36 million households in the US and millions of viewers across the globe tuned into the Super Bowl, but many didn't tune in for the game, they came for the halftime show and the commercials.



Source: ©fox news [Fox News](#)

“The Super Bowl is like nothing else in the industry in that the actual sport is almost the backdrop to what is ultimately a masterclass in hyped entertainment, that commands a global audience of over 150 million people,” says Struan Campbell, founder and director, Leverage.

A masterclass in hyped entertainment

Campbell says this year was the best halftime performance he has ever seen. “The actual Pepsi halftime show was a throwback to hip-hop’s golden age, where Dre, Eminem and Snoop were amongst a blockbuster cast.”

For him, it brought an overarching 90s revivalism theme that follows suit from a broader fashion and pop culture trend recently paying homage to the period.

Owned by Pepsi - which pays millions of dollars specifically for a 15-minute music show at a sporting final - the halftime

show is a completely novel concept in the sponsorship world.

Until 1993 the Super Bowl halftime show was pretty much a dull affair with marching bands. This changed in 1992, when Fox aired an *In Living Color* special during halftime that saw millions of viewers tune in.

The NFL realised halftime could be more than its then format and in 1993 Michael Jackson performed at halftime and the halftime entertainment tradition was born.

“While there is no doubting the impact it makes for the brand and the relevance it provides, one has to ask the cost vs. value question, but without knowing their measurement metrics this is difficult to answer,” says Campbell.

“ I laughed so hard I snorted! [#SuperBowl](#) [#SuperBowlHalftimeShow](#) [#SuperBowl2022](#) [pic.twitter.com/NOLp8vEAnp](#)—
Sativa Sally (@SativaSallys) [February 9, 2022](#) ”

Existing NFL partners

From a sponsorship perspective, it's the blockbuster moment for the existing NFL partners that have activated throughout the season. “Those partners reportedly received over \$170m worth of brand exposure amongst them from the final showpiece,” says Campbell.

This year the partners obtained more than 75 minutes of on-screen exposure - fewer than the 104 minutes provided last year according to SportPro. Is it worth the cost? “At almost R100m for 30 seconds of airtime, only those brands that are involved will know,” says Campbell.

But, says Campbell, at the end of the day this is partly a “so what” question. “It's far more important in how they engaged and involved fans to add value,” he says.

Creativity up this year

He thinks the creativity has gone up a level from the last couple of years. “This year we saw more babies, animals, cinematic productions and catchy tunes. I do always think it's hard not to deliver with the budgets and resources (massive creative teams) on hand, but there is an enormous amount of pressure attached to it too.”

This year, Campbell says, while there's always some humour involved within the myriad of pieces, it felt like it was dialled up more than ever.

He thinks the question that needs to be asked is how the creative addresses the product or brand, and if it draws an emotional response, whether it be heart-warming or laugh-out-loud.

“Ultimately it needs to entertain. If it pushes into selfish without value, it falls flat. I would say that quite a few of them scored high on the required criteria so its an overall tick this year,” he says.

Who got it right?

So, who got it right? For Campbell, Amazon's *Mind reader*, that saw Scarlett Johansson and her real-life partner, Colin Jost, play out what could happen if Alexa were to know too much about us with great performances, was a winner.

For him, the standout trend was the arrival of the Crypto players.

However, not all of them impressed. Crypto.com's *The Moment of Truth* piece, which saw LeBron James meeting his 2003 CGI self to try and land the importance of making life-changing decisions, struck him as trying too hard. "As a result, I could not see an authentic brand fit," he says.

On the other hand, he says that, something that could not be further apart from that mega-budget polished production, was Coinbase's leftfield floating QR code. "This looked like a Windows 98 screensaver and saw the QR code changing colour and moving around for a 60' slot, giving viewers enough time to get their phones out eventually and check out what was going on," he explains.

"I loved it because it was just so brave and unexpected – the intrigue got me."

The code took viewers to their website and a \$15 free bitcoin leg-up when signing up. "At a fraction of the production cost, with a direct measurable, I'd love to see if the signups were worth the almost R200m spot cost," he says.

Another trend was the 90s theme. "Given the nod in the halftime show, and how much gravitas that always has, a number of brands took that into account and came with clever links to the period in their spots," he says.

"The Michelob Ultra *Superior Bowl* ad was great. The 90s bowling themed cult classic *The Big Lebowski* tribute, was beautifully shot, had a great soundtrack and managed to pull an eclectic mix of celebrities including Steve Buscemi. Serena Williams' entry at the end just nailed it."

Mike Sharman, co-founder of Retroviral, Retroactive, MatchKit.co, Webfluentia.com and Put Foot Foundation is a huge fan of the Super Bowl commercials. He confesses that it is "one of my favourite times of the year".

"The Super Bowl always has a wonderful array of commercials - it is the Oscars of advertising."

Sharman says there was a lot of good work this year. His favourites this year are nostalgic-based.

"We saw Jim Carrey in the cable guy role for Verizon 5G basically reprising that role, while I loved the GM EV *Doctor Evil* commercial and how the cast of *Austin Powers* was reinvigorated for that one," he says.

There was some real emotional tearjerker stuff from Toyota in *Start your Impossible*. In Sharman's words: "beautiful". "Toyota also has a link with the Olympics and Paralympics in general so it's a really nice integration of that sponsorship property," he adds. (Warning, you will cry!)

One of his personal favourites is the BMW *Zeus & Hera* commercial starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Salma Hayek. (Look out for cute pegasus.)

To date, this piece of content has had over 12 million views on YouTube.

Sharman also recommends you check out the director's cuts and extras.

And in case you were wondering, the LA Rams won 23 - 20 over the Cincinnati Bengals.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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