

# IDEAS AT WORK

## Winning Strategies: What Super Bowl Ads Teach Us About Effective Marketing

### Takeaways

- The best ad campaigns focus on diversification and repetition
- Find the “Super Bowl” equivalent in your ecosystem to make a big splash
- Remember that your own “Super Bowl” ad is just one part of a larger campaign

There’s nothing like the Super Bowl. I know from personal experience, after playing in three of the games during my playing career. But it’s obvious to anyone, not just professional athletes. It’s the one game all year that we’re all watching, and it’s more pressure than any other game.

But the Super Bowl isn’t just a game; it’s an event. Tens of thousands of people spend the days leading up to the game in and around the host city. The Super Bowl halftime show is, you could say, the biggest concert of the year. And for those watching at home, even the commercials are the biggest advertising event of the year.

Even if your company isn’t looking to spend \$7 million to run a spot during the game, there are things we can learn from the best Super Bowl advertising campaigns. Any business of any size should be able to learn from what our Digital Marketing Director has to say in this article!



*Jon Tarkenton*

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The Super Bowl only comes once a year, and the ads now live on longer than the game. They are their own show! But do they provide a good ROI as a marketing strategy? While most companies cannot spend millions on a single 30-second spot, there are certain lessons to be learned from Super Bowl ads that we can all apply, no matter the marketing budget.

As soon as the game is over, “experts” start posting their lists of “best Super Bowl ads,” and you’ll notice that no two lists are the same. These best-of lists are purely subjective and no different from polling the crowd who gathered in your family room to eat chili and watch the game on Super Bowl Sunday. Ask your spouse, your friends, your neighbor, or your colleague and they all had a different favorite. Some may prefer celebrity over humor, or a big action-adventure moment over a tender storyline. We all have our own likes and dislikes, which don’t necessarily translate into effective branding – or higher sales.

So how do we figure out what really worked?

Let’s take a closer look. This year’s Super Bowl ads gave us more than water-cooler conversations and running jokes on Slack. They provide insight into the decisions that go into effective advertising.



Kawaski, for example, had never advertised in the Super Bowl before, and purposefully did so this year to unveil a new product. That is no small decision. According to USA TODAY, the price for a 30-second spot in the very first Super Bowl (1967) was \$37,000. Today, for Super Bowl 58, it cost \$7 million. And that's just for the air time. Add in the cost of producing the spot and hiring a celebrity to star in the ad, and you can easily spend \$15 million or more. What did that buy you? A record-breaking audience of 123.4 million consumers. Launching a new product at an event with huge reach can be a very smart decision.

But not if you blow your entire budget on a single 30-second spot. You have to follow up the launch with a diversified campaign. Just like an investment portfolio, do you put all your money in a single stock or category, or do you diversify? We all know the answer to that one. Spread the wealth for maximum return that will come in time.

**The key is repetition and diversification.** That means running your ad many times, over a long period of time – and deploying it across multiple channels. Digital platforms and social media provide excellent, low-cost ways to leverage your investment in a new commercial. Not only can you slice and dice ad content into a variety of digital ads and social media posts, you can build up anticipation of a new ad campaign by “teasing” it on social media before it even runs.

A good example of diversification was Dunkin’. They were not unveiling a major new product with their Super Bowl ad this year, but used the Super Bowl to kick off a well-orchestrated campaign. They used celebrities, limited-edition merchandise, and a longer, creative advertising campaign released via a range of mediums with new content based on the original concept. Dunkin’ released outtakes of the commercial on Twitter and tweaked the ad on Instagram, using a variety of platforms with a variation of the message to achieve repetition. Dunkin’ also sold limited-edition merchandise (tracksuits used in the ad) which, of course, sold-out. This generated earned media post-Super Bowl, too. The tracksuit even appeared on late-night television!

While Kawasaki and Dunkin’ are not regular football advertisers, State Farm advertises on NFL games non-stop. So advertising on the Super Bowl was just an extension of State Farm’s marketing strategy. But with so many eyeballs watching, including millions of folks who don’t regularly watch football, State Farm didn’t settle for repeating their old ads. They brought in The Terminator, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and his Twin, Danny Devito, for an over-the-top, catchy production. Although you may not be advertising on the same budget, the same lesson applies: keeping your existing ad theme but adding a new twist can attract new customers while keeping your old customers comfortable, too.



Every business has their own “Super Bowl” in their ecosystem, whether it is an annual community festival/fair, corporate conference, or local holiday celebration. This event can provide a key opportunity to elevate your business. Like Kawasaki, you can use this event to introduce a new product; or like State Farm, you can use this event to launch a new twist on your existing ad campaign.

The most important thing to remember, however, is that one ad will not change the vector of your business. If you blow your entire annual budget on your “Super Bowl,” you will have squandered the opportunity. Instead, it is essential that you think of your “Super Bowl” ad as just one piece (perhaps the first piece, or even the most expensive piece) of a larger, multi-channel campaign.

While Kawasaki, State Farm, and Dunkin' used different techniques, they shared one very important thing in common: their Super Bowl ads will work regardless of the event where viewers first saw them. When it comes to your own "Super Bowl" event, if you link your advertising too closely to that one, singular event, it will have a shorter shelf-life.

The BMW Super Bowl ad, for example, featured Usher, the prominent star of the Super Bowl halftime show, tying the ad directly to the Super Bowl. It's hard to envision that ad having the same effect post-Super Bowl, as it was so directly linked to a specific event. Do you want to extend the shelf life of your advertising? Be sure your ad makes sense even for folks who don't see it at that first launch event.

Another pitfall is overshadowing your product by the celebrity spokesperson. Using a star in your ads might make sense, but not at the expense of your business. There was a lot of buzz about BMW's Super Bowl starring Christopher Walken – but did anyone remember which car company that was? That's the aura of Christopher Walken! Unless you make sure your product stands out, the star might be all anyone remembers.

Is there a "Super Bowl" event you can use to launch a new campaign or reach new prospects? Just remember: Consistency, creativity, frequency, and repetition are keys to success. Advertise where your customers are, be there often, be there smartly with a memorable message, and keep your brand front and center.

Super Bowl ads may not share your budget, but they do share concepts for your success.

Contact our team today to learn how Tarkenton can help your business reach its own "Super Bowl" audience most effectively!



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*Josh Cohen works with our partners' marketing teams to coordinate all digital advertising initiatives, including search engine marketing, social media marketing, native advertising, display advertising, and more. Josh joined the Tarkenton team in 2021, and has also helped to provide service and support to end users on our advertising platforms. With years of media agency experience, he specializes in helping partners develop their digital marketing strategies, managing execution of those plans, and performing detailed analysis of the impact of those activities.*