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Multiplying the Payoffs From a Super Bowl Spot

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HERE is a lesson in new math, Madison Avenue style: The most expensive advertising buy of the year may turn out to be something of a bargain.

That buy is, of course, a television commercial during the Super Bowl, typically the most-watched program of any year. And while the cost this year sets a record, at an estimated average of \$2.6 million for each 30-second spot, more than two dozen marketers believe it makes sense to spend that much money despite the many cheaper alternatives.

This counterintuitive belief is predicated on a big if — if the Super Bowl is not the end of a marketing game plan but the beginning, the premium cost is economical. The spot needs to be buttressed by a panoply of complementary extensions into new media like Web sites, video clips, cellphone text messaging, blogs and short films.

In other words, one of the most traditional ways to peddle products, the 30-second TV spot, is being made relevant again by the explosion in nontraditional media choices.

For instance, [Anheuser-Busch](#), which typically buys the most commercial time of any Super Bowl advertiser, will for the first time use e-mail messages to invite consumers to vote for their favorite Super Bowl spots by sending text messages or visiting a Web site. Also, all the company's Super Bowl commercials will be posted the next day on a new Web site, [bud.tv](#).

"What you have to recognize is where the consumer's going," said Robert Lachky, executive vice president for global industry development and chief creative officer at the Anheuser-Busch division of Anheuser-Busch.

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That is particularly true, he added, for the drinkers ages 21 to 27 who are the target audience for much of the marketing for his beer brands like Bud Light.

Nationwide Insurance plans to preview its Super Bowl spot, a humorous look at the marital and career woes of the rapper Kevin Federline, by posting it Monday on its Web site (nationwide.com).

"Half the people in the United States watch the Super Bowl, but half don't," said Steven R. Schreibman, vice president for advertising and brand management at Nationwide Financial. "How do you reach them?"

"The Super Bowl is the only media property where the advertising is as big a story as the content of the show," he added, "so you want to see how much you can leverage it."

Mr. Schreibman is still agog at the response to the Nationwide spot during the Super Bowl last year, featuring the hunk Fabio demonstrating that "life comes at you fast," to quote the campaign theme.

For months afterward, computer users were still visiting Web sites like ifilm.com to watch the commercials, Mr. Schreibman said, adding: "We got 1.8 million downloads on that one site. Fabio himself keeps me apprised of that."

Garmin, a maker of G.P.S. navigation devices that will be a first-time Super Bowl sponsor, is posting video clips about its commercial on the company blog (garmin.blogs.com). The entries will be updated periodically until the game, which will be broadcast Feb. 4 by CBS.

"To look at the Super Bowl as '30 seconds and gone' was never a part of the plan," said Jon Cassat, director for marketing communications at Garmin. "We think a great audience out there responds to traditional media like television," he added, "and we think there is a great audience out there we will reach through viral means."

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To be sure, opening the wallet so wide for ads does not have universal appeal. For instance, a survey of board members of the National Sports Marketing Network, an organization with chapters in 11 cities, found that only 31 percent would recommend a Super Bowl spot to their chief executive or chief marketing officer. And 41 percent said they believed Super Bowl spots were not worth the investment.

"It's not right for everyone," said Tim Calkins, a professor of marketing at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University.

"Some of them, you scratch your head," he added. "In the hype of the Super Bowl, they get carried away."

But for “the right marketer, the Super Bowl makes wonderful sense if you think of it as a springboard to other things,” Professor Calkins said, adding: “Put the ads on the Internet. Get all the P.R. you can. Make the most of your media investment.”

Even the executive at CBS in charge of selling the estimated 30 minutes of commercial time during the game acknowledges that the spots in and of themselves are no longer, to mix sports references, slam-dunks. “It’s changed as the media have changed,” said JoAnn Ross, president for network sales at CBS. The focus now among the advertisers, she added, is on “what they can do to further the message.”

Indeed, Ms. Ross said, CBS is arranging for all the spots shown during the game to go up on one of its Web sites (cbssportsline.com) as soon as the game ends. And the network is talking to Cingular Wireless and Verizon Wireless, she added, so subscribers can watch the commercials on their cellphones.

Here is information about efforts by other Super Bowl advertisers to extend their commercial buys.

CAREERBUILDER The job search service is teasing consumers about its Super Bowl commercials with a humorous online promotion, the “Age-O-Matic” (at ageomatic.com and careerbuilder.com), which purports to show the toll taken over time by a “soul-sucking job.”

There are also teaser spots on TV to tell viewers that CareerBuilder is saying goodbye to the comic chimpanzees that appeared in its Super Bowl commercials in 2005 and 2006.

“If a campaign doesn’t have a whole bunch of legs, it shouldn’t get launched,” said Peter Krivkovich, chief executive at the CareerBuilder agency, Cramer-Krasselt. “If you add the legs, you can put your campaign on turbocharge.” CareerBuilder is owned by Gannett, McClatchy and Tribune.

FRITO-LAY The Frito-Lay unit of PepsiCo is sponsoring a contest for consumers to create a Super Bowl commercial for Doritos snack chips. The work of the five finalists, selected from 1,100 entries, can be watched on a Web site (crashthesuperbowl.com). The winning spot, chosen through an online vote, will run exactly as the consumer made it, the company promises.

“It was worth the risk we took,” said Ann Mukherjee, vice president for marketing at Frito-Lay. “It has far exceeded any online promotion Frito-Lay has ever done.”

Frito-Lay will throw a Super Bowl party on Feb. 4 for the finalists to “watch the

game and find out in the moment" who won, Ms. Mukherjee said, and the results will be taped for future use online.

GENERAL MOTORS The Chevrolet division of General Motors is sponsoring a contest for teams of college students to create an idea for a Super Bowl spot, which a Chevy agency, Campbell-Ewald, part of the [Interpublic Group of Companies](#), will produce for the game.

The contest is chronicled at chevycollegead.com and the five finalist teams are the stars of "Webisodes," video clips styled like TV shows. They can be watched online at cbs.com/specials/superbowls_greatest_commercials/chevy/. The winning team will be revealed on a special, "Super Bowl's Greatest Commercials," on CBS on Feb. 2.