



Shock Top Had a Commercial in the Big Game. But That Wasn't the Point.

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Stakes run high for a brand's first-ever Super Bowl effort. Here Jake Kirsch, vice president of Shock Top, speaks with Kate Stanford, director of YouTube ads marketing, to look back on the brand's debut Super Bowl campaign, lessons learned, and why the team took a digital-first approach.

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As brand look ahead to big game campaigns for this season, many are looking back to learn from last season's success stories. One such success was Shock Top, a first-time Super Bowl advertiser in 2016. Shock Top had a television ad during the game, but that was far from the whole story. Here I sit down with Jake Kirsch to look back on how the team approached its big game campaign and what they learned from it.

Kate Stanford, YouTube: Why do brands continue to invest so heavily in the Super Bowl? And, what did this moment mean for your brand?

Jake Kirsch, Shock Top: The Super Bowl is one of the biggest moments for brands. It offers a rare combination of reach and engagement. And it's one of the few times consumers are ready to lean in to the content we create and really interact with it.

We knew we needed a big awareness boost for Shock Top and wanted to center the campaign around one of the biggest beer occasions in the first quarter of the year—the Super Bowl. More important than our Super Bowl television commercial were the digital elements surrounding the campaign. We wanted to be sure that our content strategy for the campaign was live on all channels and coming to life in different ways.

"More important than our Super Bowl television commercial were the digital elements surrounding the campaign."

What was Shock Top's 2016 Super Bowl campaign? What was the inspiration behind it?

We had a creative idea rooted in the icon of our brand, the orange Wedgehead, talking "unfiltered." We'd been running different variations of the concept with good success in Canada and the U.S.

For the Super Bowl, we wanted to amp up the concept a bit with actor T.J. Miller from the HBO series, "Silicon Valley." The [television ad](#) that

aired during the game featured our mascot, Wedgehead, engaging in an "unfiltered talk" with T.J.

We then followed up with a digital spot the next day where Wedgehead and T.J. reviewed all of the Super Bowl commercials. Much of it was ad-libbed, and the result was super on-brand and really funny.

Shock Top | "Unfiltered
Big Game Ad Review"
with T.J. Miller |
Extended Cut



If we end up doing a similar campaign again, we will continue to bet on digital content surrounding a live event.

Your campaign spanned more than game day itself. How did you think about making the most of the televised Super Bowl moment?

Without the budget of some of the bigger brands, we had to be very purposeful in where and how we invested. To maximize the Super Bowl campaign, we thought of it in three phases—the before, during, and after. We knew the day after the Super Bowl was a huge opportunity, and we capitalized on it with our "Big Game Ad Review."

And to build up and sustain the momentum of the TV commercial, we knew we had to leverage digital. Overall, we balanced broad reach with contextual targeting, creating over 90 pieces of content released over a one-month period. The idea was to balance the hero creative with

extended cuts and contextual pre-roll ads to build out the campaign.

We started very early with an [extended version](#) of our Super Bowl spot on YouTube. This was our way of putting our best foot forward heading into February. And it helped us get PR ahead of pre-releases from other brands.

After the pre-release, we followed with smaller, more sharable versions and outtakes, providing plenty of content for our fans who wanted to engage with more.

"We will continue to bet on digital content surrounding a live event."

Weirdly enough, we didn't heavily promote our actual 30-second Super Bowl TV commercial, but instead put our media weight behind the additional digital-only spots we had created. We knew that while the 30-second TV spot was great, made-for-digital content always outperforms. And we saw that in the results.

**What was your approach to some of that made-for-digital content?
What made it work so well?**

We were inspired by the idea of (super) short-form content—even as short as four or five seconds. We saw an example of a campaign done in Australia where there were custom short form video ads that contextually aligned with the videos they ran beside, and I thought, why can't we do that even better?

We created over 60 quick pre-roll ads (four to nine seconds long) that related to the content they would run against. We pinpointed the most watched and searched-for content categories on YouTube that were relevant for our brand and true to the Wedgehead personality.



To find the same kind of insights the Shock Top team used to inform its strategy, use free tools like [YouTube's Trending Tab](#) or the [YouTube filter in Google Trends](#).

Because the ad was related to the type of content the viewer was about to watch, it was super contextual and entertaining. For example, [in one ad](#), Wedgehead comments that he tastes the way skipping an ad feels, which we ran before food- and recipe-related videos.



The Record

One opportunity that digital—especially YouTube—presents is optimizing in real-time and getting a pulse on viewer engagement. Did Shock Top do any real-time optimizations?

We optimized to stronger creative throughout the campaign, eventually using results from our YouTube buy to decide what we ran on TV for

the rest of the campaign. We ran 11 different versions on YouTube, and identified two 15-second cuts to run post Super Bowl. The metrics we examined were view-through rate (VTR) and brand lift on ad recall.

We loved the positive comments and engagement that came from our YouTube investment, and that's something that is hard to see on TV. For example our pre-released 90-second teaser had a 68-second average duration, meaning that viewers were really enjoying our spot.

What was your strategy for using the different YouTube ad formats in the campaign (i.e., homepage takeover, TrueView, etc)?

We used the [YouTube masthead](#) (homepage takeover) to drive engagement with our post-game ad review the Monday after Super Bowl. And we used [TrueView](#) throughout the campaign, but most especially at the beginning to drive views of the ad well ahead of the game.

"While the 30-second TV spot was great, made-for-digital content always outperforms."

We found the YouTube masthead (homepage takeover) drove incredibly efficient engagement, allowing us to reach a massive audience incredibly quickly. We also utilized [Google Preferred](#).

How did you measure the campaign? Did you consider it a success?

We saw improvement in key brand measures as well as in our first quarter sales trend. Digitally we measured views, clicks, and VTR. We also ran [Brand Lift](#) studies on almost every element of the campaign. We proved that we grew brand health when we looked at studies on ad recall, favorability, and consideration. We also saw a massive lift in Google searches for "Shock Top."