



NAWRAS ADEATERSPEAK is an exclusive weekly thought leadership column on advertising, marketing, PR and branding by leading experts.

My Favorite TV Spots Of All Time

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In honor of the AdEaters event, I thought it fitting that I compile my own list of the best TV commercials of all time. These are spots, that, in my opinion, changed the way we think of advertising or at least the way we thought of the product. They were all groundbreaking in their own way and achieved what TV does best: they made us feel something.

In my opinion, the best television commercials are never a rational argument: they create an emotional reaction to the product that sticks with us much longer than any rational argument ever could. Note how little copy (if any) most of them have: In television, the most effective spots are never copy intense; they let the viewer draw their conclusion from a broader message.

So with that as an intro, here are my Top Ten. You can watch these ads at www.adeatersmuscat.com

1. VW – Snowplow (US, 1964): (*In Dutch, original spot was in English*): One of the classic VW spots from Doyle Dane Bernbach, this simple spot, a mini-movie, really, shows how the snowplow driver gets to the snowplow. It's ever more remarkable given that, at the time, car commercials consisted of 60 seconds of showing the car and touting its fine features – no single-minded thought at all. Even more remarkable: with a slight update of the quality of the film and soundtrack, this spot would seem just as fresh today as it did 40 years ago.

2. Apple – 1984 (US, 1984): The most famous Super Bowl commercial of them all. “1984” from then-upstart agency Chiat/Day, this spot introduced the idea of the commercial-as-event. A truly cinematic work, which makes people work just enough to get the metaphor, this spot still sets the standard by which all other Super Bowl spots are judged. As an army of drones sits in an auditorium listening to their leader spew forth doublespeak, a young woman runs in and flings a hammer at the screen. A voiceover and super title at the end contain the only line of copy: “On

January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like “1984.” It's a brand positioning Apple still owns, 23 years later.

3. AlkaSeltzer – “Spicy Meatball” (US, 1970): This one afforded me and my childhood friends hours of comic relief. In a commercial-within-a-commercial, an actor keeps having to taste “Magdalini's Meatballs” and exclaim “Mamma Mia! That's a spicy meat-a-ball” in an Italian accent. And every time he mucks it up slightly. After multiple takes, he's ready for some Alka-Seltzer. Great little movie, nice humor. Don't know if the forces of political correctness would let this one run today, but it definitely sealed the notion that Alka Seltzer = stomach trouble relief in a comical way that did nothing to reduce the notion of the product's effectiveness.

4. Starbucks – “Glen” (US, 2004): One of the funniest commercials in recent memory, this Fallon spot has 1980s hair band Survivor following young office worker Glen on his way into work, cheering him on with an inspirational song set to the tune of “Eye of the Tiger” (their hit from the movie Rocky.) With brilliantly satirical lyrics like “*status call reports have finally met their rival*” this spot strikes a chord with the young adult demographic, but the silliness never overwhelms a relevant story about the benefits of Starbucks canned double shot espresso.

5. Wendy's – “Where's The Beef?” (US, 1984): Director Joe Sedelmaier set the ad world on its ear with this spot from Dancer, Fitzgerald, Sample, which featured a stereotypical little old lady (brilliantly played by the late Clara Peller) looking at a hamburger from a rival chain and asking “Where's The Beef?” in a somewhat belligerent tone. The offbeat casting, pacing, and humor were all revolutionary in their day and the phrase “Where's The Beef?” worked itself into the popular zeitgeist, even making an appearance in the 1984 U.S. presidential campaign when Wal-

ter Mondale used it to slam Gary Hart. For Wendy's however, it effectively got across the notion that Wendy's hamburgers were bigger than their competitors in a way that made people like the upstart chain.

6. Levi's – Drugstore (UK, 1994): Michel Gondry's classic Levi's spot (via BBH) evokes Depression-era America to sell the quintessential American blue jean to the UK market. Beautifully shot in black and white, with no dialog, it's a wonderful re-interpretation of the oft-told tale of the boy who buys a condom from the drug store, only to find out the girl he's picking up later is the druggist's daughter. The mood and tone evoke the sort of authenticity Levi's legend is built on, and the one line of copy at the end, “Watch pocket created in 1873. Abused ever since” gives it the right ironic touch.

7. Guardian – POV (UK, 1987): Taking a page from “Roshoman” this classic spot for the *Guardian* newspaper shows the same scene from three different points of view to illustrate the difference a slant on the news can make. The surprise ending really makes a strong point however, and makes you think: precisely the message the *Guardian* wants you to take away.

8. Nike – If You Let Me Play Sports (US, 1995): I know a good half dozen women who cried the first time they watched this commercial, a paean to the benefits of encouraging young women to be athletes. Nike, with their category dominance, is the only brand that could successfully put out this message and the commercial, via Wieden and Kennedy, is a powerful vehicle for it, heartfelt and earnest without ever veering towards hokeyness. The net result is that Nike captured the hearts (and wallets) of thousands of athletically inclined women, while raising the general awareness of the value of women's sports.

9. Pepsi – Cindy Crawford (US, 1991): BBDO at their finest. This charming spot, devised solely to introduce a new Pepsi can, uses

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the classic misdirect, as scantily clad supermodel Cindy Crawford buys a can of Pepsi from a vending machine to the tune of “Just One Look” while two young boys watch on, spell-bound. But it's not Crawford that has the boys' attention: it's the new Pepsi can. Successfully melding America's obsessions with fame, sex and pop music, the spot managed to make Pepsi seem iconic; its new can even more so.

10. Guinness – Horses (UK, 1999): An epic fantasy spot, beautifully shot by Jonathan Glazer, that makes waiting for a Guinness into a feat as heroic as landing on the moon. As the voiceover recites a disjointed poem about waiting and Captain Ahab, we see footage of a group of surfers riding waves that turn into white horses. The spot ends with the surfers congratulating each other on a wave well-ridden as the voiceover intones “Here's to waiting” and a super over a glass of Guinness reads “Good things come to those who...” The spot serves to further mythologize Guinness and, rather than dwell of the purity of the hops or excellence of the flavor, it creates a visceral reaction in the viewer that works even more effectively to position the brand.

Tangerine Toad is the “nom-de-blog” of a New York based creative director who's spent 20 years working at some of the best-known online and offline ad agencies. It's given him the ability to speak both television and Web 2.0. Often in the same sentence.