

DO FUNNY ADS HELP SELL PRODUCTS? A STUDY SAYS, “NO”



A recent study, by Ace Metrix has found that agency make funny ads for two reasons, to make the viewer's laugh and to entice them into buying the products or service advertised. The report goes on to say, whilst they do manage to make the viewer's guffaw and chuckle but they fail in getting them to reach into their pockets and do what the ad is exhorting them to do. Ace Metrix surveyed every national commercial released between January and March 2012, totaling more than 6,500 ads, to use its self-devised, “funny index” to gauge such criteria as likability, watchability and level of persuasion. All three criteria were based on responses from online surveys. If you will recollect the commercials from the 2012 Super Bowl, most were uproariously funny. The study estimates that the ads from last two Super Bowls have been thrice as funny as the average TV commercial. But on the effectiveness meter the funny ad fall short as the report shows that they don't steer the viewer in the direction the advertiser hopes. Many a time a viewer has asked himself a question after enjoying a humorous ad, that was funny, but how is it supposed to make me interested in buying the product? Most funny ads barely show the brand or brand, so busy they are telling a story that the product takes second place. Ace Metrix's research concentrated on finding why, the funny ad, undoubtedly the most popular commercial category, did not translate into better sales. Does it have any worth beyond making the viewer laugh? Did it arouse his curiosity? Did it incite a desire or interest in the product? In spite of the findings of the research, agencies and companies who invest their time, effort and tons of money into funny ads, think that they are worthwhile and useful. If they did not think so, surely they would desist from dropping millions on advertising campaigns and buying prime-time spots that cost a fortune. Steve Bassett, a creative director at the Martin Agency, said that if used properly, humor works. “Humor has always been very successful for us,” he added. The yardstick that Ace Metrix created to test the effectiveness of humor in TV ads, was by forming a funny index and checked how many times words like “lol, lmfao, hilarious, good joke and funny” appeared in reference to funny commercials. The more such words were used the higher it was ranked on the “funny” index. However, Ace Metrix found out that “level of persuasion” was low and they were unlikely to increase the desire of intent to purchase, even though they were “more appealing and more memorable than their unfunny counterparts.” Commercials that played it straight were much more effective, even though they ranked low on the popularity meter. However, to generalize that all funny ads are ineffective would be wrong, just as it would be to say that all straight ads are effective. The perfect ad would be one that combines the best parts of both, that is it has the appeal of the funny ad and the effectiveness of the straight ones. There have been funny ads that have managed to combine both. The survey cites that one such ad was the “Baby Wets The Room” for Huggies. This was the hilarious spot in which a baby boy, whilst getting his diaper changed sprays all over the room like a garden sprinkler. It was ranked as 12 times funnier than the average commercial and also many times more effective than the normal diaper advertisement. Analysts say that irrespective of whether the commercial is funny or serious, it must tell the viewer's why the product that is being advertised is worth spending money upon and why he should prefer it over the dozens others available in the market. This should be obvious, the ad if it does not carry the product what else is it for? How many times have we seen ads and have not the slightest idea what it is trying to sell, leave alone why we should be buying it. The Huggies ad was successful because it conveys the message that a kid with a serious bladder problem can be contained. If the ad is funny just for the sake of being funny, than the purpose is lost. Recollect in your mind some of the funniest ads you have seen, while you will be able to recollect them easily, you may not so easily be able to tell which product they are associated with. Michael Curran, the author of the study and Ace Metrix's director of insights and analytics, gave his opinion and said, “Messages must be built of substance and should use humor as a supplement — not a replacement — to create the most effective ads ... Funny ads drive other great advertising attributes such as attention and likeability. However, low information and relevance on many funny ads results in creating lower desire for the advertised products than non-funny ads.”