



Podcast #044

The Best & Worst of Christmas Adverts 2018

Hi listeners. Welcome to the Marketing Menu podcast with me Liz and Nicky and we've got a slight change of plan, listeners, that we hope is going to work to your benefit. We had planned this week to talk about charities and how to help them raise their profile, particularly when it comes to funding applications. But Nicky has had a change of circumstances that will actually benefit listeners. So, do you want to tell them a bit about that?

Yes, I'm going to be chairing a panel discussion with our local Unitary Authority and Shadow Counsellors on the voluntary sector this week. So, I felt it was important that maybe I attend that and maybe there might be something from that that I can bring to the podcast community. Which might be more pertinent to charitable initiatives, maybe post New Year.

I think that would be a brilliant time to do it actually at the beginning of the New Year, so our first podcast in the New Year will be on the 16th of January. Today we're going to focus on the exciting world of Christmas ads.

I thought we could look at the best and the worst of the Christmas ads just to round up the end of the year, a lighthearted look back at what people come up with.

Well, I have been watching because you tend to have the build-up, don't you? People are like looking forward to the John Lewis ad, which I know we're going to talk about a little bit later. That's part of the Christmas build-up.

It is now, it's become so in the last sort of four to five years.

I said this to somebody else. It was like in the old days it used to be you look forward to the Morecambe & Wise Show core at Christmas and now people look forward to the John Lewis advert.

Anyway, enough said, shall we take listeners through what we think might be some of the best and some of the worst of the Christmas ads. And obviously, people can please chip in with their own thoughts after the podcast.

Do let us know because we do love your feedback.

So, would you like to kick off?

I really like that Waitrose Fast Forward advert, I think this just shows a brilliant sense of humour because John Lewis must have agreed to let them use the ad in the Waitrose ad. So, this is where I think it works on so many levels. So instead of waiting with bated breath for the John Lewis ad, the couple are sat down,

they've got other things on their minds. They've got a dark chocolate orange stollen waiting for them, which obviously is a lovely Waitrose classy product and the dad explains between mouthfuls what he's watching - the John Lewis Elton John ad - and says that he actually prefers the Monty the Penguin ad, just absolute genius, which was in 2014. And as I said, I think it shows that John Lewis and Waitrose actually have a really good sense of humour and that it's also a clever way of bringing the two brands closer together in the minds of consumers. And that's a long-term ambition for any business partnership really. In general, the decision to take themselves a little less seriously as a good move for Waitrose, I think, because they are positioned as a premium quality brand and maybe slightly exclusive, whereas they've made themselves a bit more human in this advert. It's just one of the six adverts in their Too Good To Wait series for Christmas, 2018, which shows singers ditching their choir performances in favour of chocolate and cherry mince pies. And a woman's skipping a kiss under the mistletoe to get her hands on a cranberry stuffed turkey breast. Well, who wouldn't?

Now I liked the one which features the Heathrow Bears return. This makes me go all tingly. That's why it's worked for me. So, this is Doris and Edward who've injected some much-needed festive cheer into what I think overall has been a lacklustre Christmas ad season, perhaps. Many brands have foregone the sort of usual extravaganza in favour of more product-led, more commercial campaigns. And I think the Heathrow Bears just provide that perfect antidote.

Do we really want to be inundated with products? But then the danger is that they get a little bit too clever for themselves and you miss the point and I know we're going to talk about the Elton John advert which has proved a little bit contentious.

Well, back to the Teddy Bears. And so they're returning for a third year running and this sees the couple missing their British Christmas back home because they've retired to a Florida resort and it is a bit of a tearjerker. It's set to the 80's classic, Paul Young's Every Time You Go Away, which adds a few goosebumps of its own. I think the ad perfectly balances humour with heartwarming charm to deliver all the Christmas feel-good factor that we need at this time of year, without going too overboard. Interestingly, a study by Realeyes of the 20 Christmas ads by British brands has actually shown that the Heathrow Airport one is the most engaging ad of this year. That's related to the highest percentage of positive comments is what they base that on. So, I guess at a time when brands are fighting to get noticed, familiarity with your characters who've come back shouldn't be underestimated. I have to confess, have been a fan of those ads since the beginning as each story has evolved without losing the charm. It's a good way to get your brand out there and get noticed, I think.

I think you're right, it's tapping into the emotions, isn't it? If you've got a successful campaign and you've got a character that people have engaged with, and you show that same character the following year, immediately people tap back into that emotion. So, talking about returning characters and tapping into old memories, we should mention here Aldi's Kevin the Carrot, who is also back for the third year running. Now after a teaser showed the story taking a dramatic turn, as Kevin drove a lorry, which brilliantly played on the Coca-Cola advert, even using the same type of music, it was very clever, Kevin ended up skidding on some snow. We now find out that Kevin and the family had been kidnapped by an evil parsnip called Pascal. Who comes up with this? They get paid millions to do this. Jim Broadbent narrates. Now they spend a lot of money getting the right people to do the voiceover and he does do it brilliantly. I think he's got one of those voices that people just love.

Nice warm tone to it.

Absolutely. And viewers watch to see where the Kevin and his family manage to escape. It's points from me for storytelling. But personally, I find it all a bit naff even if baby carrots can be cute,

I have to say I can't remember it from previous years either. It's only this year that it's resonating with me. I think there was also that furore a couple of weeks ago about everyone queuing up for the carrots at Aldi. There are these stuffed carrot toys, apparently, there was a big fracas and people fighting each other off? No, it doesn't really work for me either. I like the premise, as you say, the storytelling aspect on the repeat characterisation.

One I'm not sure about is John Lewis and the boy and the piano,

A bit Marmite?

I think because it's very clever in that it taps into the emotions because I don't like adverts that try to be so clever that you can't actually get the point. Now I can see the point in the Elton John ad, that if you give a present to someone, you never know where it's going to lead them and I particularly find that that really emotional at the very end of the ad when it's Elton John as a little boy and he presses the first key on the piano and you think, wow, where's that going to lead him? So, I like that that's quite simple. For me, it's just kind of got away from Christmas. So apparently the boy and the piano is more engaging than their three previous campaigns.

Yes, Moz the Monster didn't really do it for them last year.

And the penguin, but it's less engaging than four others. So if you measure success in terms of how much attention, emotional engagement and positive sentiment a Christmas ad generates, then this one is doing really successfully. According to Realeyes again, which used its artificial emotional intelligence technology to rank the eight John Lewis Christmas ads that have been published since 2011, this heartfelt biopic of the Rocket Man gets an overall score of 7.8 out of 10, placing it fifth in emotional engagement and continuous attention from viewers and I think the continuous attention probably is because it shows him at different stages of his life. It's also generated the fifth highest proportion of positive comments at 75% driven mainly by the choice of soundtrack, which of course is Your Song. If they'd used a different track, it wouldn't have worked so well. On the other hand, 18% of the comments were negative with British consumers particularly critical of John Lewis's use of a big celebrity. So, does it undermine the message because people are thinking you've spent millions and millions on getting Elton John to do it, so it's kind of that trustworthy thing? Apparently, he was reportedly paid £5million for his participation in the ad, which is half John Lewis's whopping supposedly £10million budget for the project. Listeners, what do you think? Does it undermine the credibility of the business? Because you know, they spent a lot of money getting a celebrity to make their advert the most talked about. I believe it does.

Yes, I see where you're coming from on that. It's less about the merchandise.

And it's more about being the biggest Christmas advert on telly that year.

Which brings me onto one of the ones that I hate, then Liz. My negative for all of this Christmas advertising is TK Maxx.

I don't know if I've seen that one.

Oh, it's that cringy one with the neverending stocking. Now, I don't know if it's the constant belching, the neverending stocking just looks like it might live in your intestine. Not very endearing at all, but also the reason I dislike it is because it's about the story of the gift-giving supersock that comes to life after a customer finds it nestled between the shelves of a store. Now my 18-year-old daughter did not get the premise of this advert at all. She did not realise that there were free gifts if you found this stocking in the store. She just thought it was more about TK Maxx, the gift that keeps giving and she hadn't picked up on the fact that you were supposed to go on to their webpage and to find out more about how to be involved. In fact, I did go onto their website and then I had to scroll down over two-thirds of the page before I found any mention of the neverending stocking. To me, it just seemed like they missed a whole trick. Hadn't got a purpose-built landing page at the very least. It just seems to reek of an ill thought out campaign. So that's a big no for me, I'm afraid.

So, what about Sainsbury's? I can't be the only person that was disappointed when Sainsbury's dropped the Christmas ad blockbuster last year in favour of a more consistent brand approach. It came as a bit of a shock. Their festive spots have given John Lewis a run for their money from Mog's Christmas Calamity to the true story of the Christmas Day Truce during World War One. Now I have my own views on that and I remember talking about this to students when we were looking at Christmas ads and it was interesting getting their take on it and they were very much split between those that felt it was quite rightly raising awareness of the World War One centenary and others that felt that it was commercialising it because of the merchandise that was sold alongside it. Now this year is advert is directed by Michael Gracey, who's

also the director of The Greatest Showman. It follows the story of a young girl dressed as a star who was nervous to perform on stage and she soon gets her confidence before starting the audience with a rendition of a. You Get What You Give. It strikes at your heart, doesn't it, because it's a little girl, it's the Christmas performance. Every parent's been there, got emotional watching their child on stage, all that kind of thing. The star of the show is also supported by a cast of weird and wonderful Christmas characters from a bauble to a plug. Some of the children in the cost were as young as six years old and they actually spoke about their roles in some really hilarious backstage footage, it's really worth watching. But the main reason I'm picking this ad is for the plug boy who's been much talked about. People have reacted furiously to the news that Sainsbury's Christmas adverts plug boy received a number of health and safety complaints. He launches himself perfectly into a giant socket to light up a Christmas tree but the Advertising Standards Authority revealed that it's received 35 complaints over fears children would copy this advert and be encouraged to start playing with the plug sockets. Well, there are several answers to that. Get yourself some plug covers, but also have you seen the size of the socket? Huge.

I think we need to be more concerned about an old man falling down a chimney rather than any of that me, so I think we need to speak more, but that's more akin to the Christmas spirit.

Here we should also mention Sainsbury's consistency through the behind the scenes video. It's all part of the campaign, of the brand awareness.

Okay, so back to some of the worst adverts then that may have featured in 2018. Of course, everybody will have their own viewpoint. I'm sure you'll shout if you madly disagree, listeners. Now this year's crop of Christmas ads has been described as being a little bit anonymous. I guess it could be a sign also of the challenging retail landscape and the high street this year, which is obviously being battered wave upon wave by the competition of online and the likes of Amazon and so on, so forth. Okay. So back to some of the advertisements that have featured in this year's Christmas campaigns. Now for me, Liz, I have to highlight one of them which I'm not so keen on, which may be due to the fact that in the past they've done quite a bit of what I call vanity TV projects when it comes to Christmas. But this year Marks and Spencer's has gone unashamedly commercial in their approach. We have Holly Willoughby, so she's starring in this year's campaign and the idea is it's for the must-haves that make Christmas. That's the premise, but I think I'm going to criticise Marks and Spencer's for being unashamedly commercial in their approach and the reason why is because word on the street is that whilst campaigns such as Mrs Claus and last year's Paddington had many fans that didn't necessarily drive sales, here we are with a campaign that is really light on emotion and storytelling, but really heavy on product, product, product. I think they've gone a bit too far that way. I can't help feeling a little bit disappointed in them for taking this approach. I guess it's not surprising that they've taken this route though. Marks and Spencer's is under immense pressure as we all know, about declining sales, so for a company looking to cut costs, this campaign is clearly cheaper to produce and there's nothing like the £10million price tag that we heard John Lewis has done. It just focuses too much on the short term of its brand building and I think its brand will take a further hit. It really can't afford to have that happen either at the moment.

Now, let's look at Boots the Chemist have had a different range of ads. They are mainly product led, aren't they? Which is good because that's what you remember. I used to love going to get the Boots catalogue. Now the high street chemist is encouraging the nation to get them something that says you get them this Christmas. The feelings evoked in the brand's 2018 advert will resonate with mothers and daughters all over as we see a teenage girl and her mum struggle to just get each other. We've all been there. We've both got daughters. From mum disapproving of her daughter's makeup to the girl sneakily using mum's perfume. Yep. Been there as well. It's all very relatable.

And I quite like that one. A very soft advert. Probably minimal expense as well. Very minimal.

It's that Robbie Williams song, isn't it? Instead of saying she's the one, it's she's my mum.

Yes, it was a good one. I thought it just goes to show you don't have to have a big budget necessarily for this stuff. You just want to think about the storytelling and how it's resonating with certain audiences. I am not aware of Boots having other adverts. Have they done other adverts as well? But they've passed me by.

Now, that's the interesting thing, isn't it? Because neither of us can remember them.

But maybe they're male orientated? I'm just thinking this is very one way.

Hang on. Yes. Did they do last year somebody coming home, was it the mum coming home from a night shift? So again, playing on the family emotion, the every day, the ordinary - they know their target market.

Okay, good. Well, considering we've been up to our eyeballs in Christmas ads over the last three weeks, it's taken me a while to find a favourite.

I don't feel, if I'm being honest, particularly attached to any of them, nor any more Christmassy or inclined to go and buy presents anywhere in particular due to any of the ads, but there is one that has captured my attention, which I think is a bit of an unsung hero. And that's the Visa ad. So, Visa has turned the spotlight on real local business owners who are, after all, the real heroes of the British high street. Now this ad features nine real, and they are real, there's evidence, I've checked it, shopkeepers, including a florist in Primrose Hill and a butchers up north and they're all singing along to the Mariah Carey All I Want For Christmas Is You and inviting the nation to visit the high street this Christmas. Apart from the Mariah Carey thing, I'm fine with it. I'm not a fan.

The interesting thing is I now know the advert, but I didn't realise it was for Visa.

Yes. And it's Visa. And so the campaign though has gone a little bit further than what we may have realised. They are actually celebrating 100 independent retailers nationwide by doing promotional personalised adverts on billboards in prime local locations and geo-targeting ads on social media too, which spotlights their business in the run-up to Christmas. So I think this ad was actually treated by mega advertising agency, Saatchi and Saatchi but it is nice insofar, for me, it switched the focus of the traditional format of the Christmas marketing campaign from what people are buying to who they're buying it for to who they're buying it from. And I really liked that idea, so it really encourages shoppers to support their high streets and their local communities this year which is what Christmas is all about!

Indeed! Support your local business.

So by working with this, they're encouraging the nation to visit the high street this Christmas and celebrate independent retailers. So, from The Marketing Menu's point of view, that's what we're all about.

So we hope you enjoyed that little trip down Christmas ads lane, listeners, and that just leaves us to wish you a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous and successful New Year and we'll be back as we mentioned at the beginning of the podcast on the 16th January. We're going to take a break now for Christmas and we'll be back on the 16th January talking about again about charities and what Nicky has brought back from the meeting that she's going to be chairing.

I think if you're listening to any of the podcasts over the break at all and you have any questions in terms of your marketing activity for 2019, please, please, please do get in touch by emailing. hello@themarketingmenu.com.

Fantastic. So that just leaves us to say a goodbye from me, Liz Gordon.

And a goodbye from me, Nicky Matthews.

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