

Monday Night Football

Problem

How does a well-known television show establish itself as “appointment viewing”?

Solution

Connect with the existing fanbase through formats that speak to the heart of the brand.

Background

Monday Night Football (MNF) began airing in 1970 on ABC. The MNF brand was already a television icon when it moved from ABC to ESPN in 2006 and the first season on ESPN enjoyed tremendous ratings. In support of the inaugural 2006 MNF season, the media plan utilized heavy market-coverage media to raise awareness among sports fans of the move from ABC to ESPN. In 2007, a similar awareness campaign was undertaken but the ratings for the 2007 season decreased by 10% from 2006.

MNF had scheduling challenges, as the game was not always a marquee match-up. ESPN also did not have the advantage of flex-scheduling that NBC enjoyed with its Sunday Night Football games.

Awareness of MNF on ESPN among sports fans and the key M18-49 target demographic was high, but with ratings declining, ESPN needed to increase the importance of MNF among NFL fans, and to create the feeling that MNF was “appointment viewing.”

Objective

There were several objectives for the 2008 campaign. The overall media plan objective was to increase ratings year-on-year. In addition, the campaign needed to build excitement among sports fans for the return of MNF and to create a deeper level of engagement between sports fans and the MNF brand.

The target demographic for this campaign was M18-49, with a psychographic target of sports fans and specifically NFL fans. Given the relatively broad nature of this demographic target, and the desire for an increase in national ratings, it was determined that using out of home media in a broad context in key markets would be consistent with the objectives.

Strategy

Markets: Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Washington DC
Flight Dates: August -September 2008



Out of Home Formats Used: Bus shelters, wild posters, digital elevator screens

Plan Details

Markets: 20 markets within EMBARQ's service area

Flight Dates: December 29, 2008 - March 30, 2009; many postings continued beyond that date to maintain message awareness

Out of Home Formats Used: Bulletins, wallscapes, barn advertising, mobile billboards, mall murals, door hangers

Results

Ratings for Monday Night Football in 2008 showed modest gains from 2007 ratings. Overall HH rating for 2008 increased by 3%, with a 1% increase in the M18-49 demographic. These overall season ratings increases were achieved with a substantial advertising budget cut as well as heavy competition from presidential election news coverage. Additionally, the second half of the MNF season (November and December) received minimal paid advertising support. The ratings for MNF games that received support with paid advertising showed an increase of 14% in the M18-49 demographic.

During the planning stages of the program, the potential for vandalism and/or theft of the turf materials was discussed. Given the nature of the material and the affinity towards ESPN and the Monday Night Football brand, the potential for theft was quite high. However, because theft of the material most likely meant the turf was being taken as a souvenir by MNF fans, this was viewed as a qualitative measure of success for the campaign.

The level of thefts in all markets was much greater than expected. Overall, over 75% of the total turf ads installed for the MNF campaign were stolen during the 4-week campaign. As a response to the high level of theft, ESPN produced place-based ad messages on standard materials which made reference to the theft of the turf materials.

