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# Under Armour's Super Bowl Spot: Internal Rallying Cry Does Not an Ad Make

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Best intentions may have paved Under Armour's road to glory, but those intentions didn't get the brand there. By now, we've all read the slashing of the spot that was supposed to signal Under Armour's coming of age – critics called it “a rip off of Apple's 1984 ad” “too dark” “visually busy.”



Under Armour "New Prototype" Ad

While I agree with these judgments about the creative approach of the spot, I'd like to offer an assessment based on the strategy behind the execution.

Comments from Steve Battista, Under Armour's VP-brand, indicate the ad was about more than the launch of the brand into mainstream footwear. "...A funny thing happened during the creation of this spot. It became bigger than a Super Bowl commercial. More than a footwear launch campaign. Before the creative was even unveiled to the entire company, the [ad] had already become our corporate mentality."

What Steve describes is indeed an exciting phenomena – that the company would rally around a brand idea which transcends their product offering is a transformation most visionary leaders hope for. The process of creating the ad seemed to ignite employees' passions and fuel internal culture change that has no doubt produced a stronger organization.

Unfortunately it didn't produce a strong ad. The power of the spot as an internal rallying cry is obvious; its power to challenge Nike's dominance is more suspect. It seems the Under Armour team allowed their personal passions to detract from developing and executing an effective advertising strategy.

First, the spot doesn't differentiate Under Armour from Nike, or any athletic brand for that matter. Under Armour's New Prototype line of footwear has some serious, proprietary technology built into it but you wouldn't know it from the ad. Given the existing credibility of the brand in high performance products, the spot should have communicated how this new line takes their products to the next level. Instead the spot appeals to image and emotion only and leaves the viewer wondering “where's the beef?”

Perhaps beer brands can be forgiven for relying solely on entertainment to get them through the Super Bowl – after all, there are very few substantive ways to differentiate alcoholic beverages. But when you have something meaningful and compelling to say, as Under Armour surely did, why not say it?

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Furthermore it seems incongruous to position the New Prototype line as revolutionary by using the same visuals and storylines every other athletic brand uses in their communications. How many times before have we seen athletes accomplishing near-superhuman feats, sweating through a workout, and looking tough and fierce? The strength of Apple's 1984 commercial was that we had never seen anything like it before – and it was a completely different way for a computer company to communicate. If Under Armour truly wanted to ignite a revolution, it should have created a spot that challenged our assumptions about footwear and forced us to “think different.”

The final strategic misstep of Under Armour's Super Bowl undertaking was missing its target audience. The brand's mission, according to Battista, is “to make all athletes better” and the products in the New Prototype line are billed as “performance trainers.” However, people who consider themselves “athletes” and who are serious enough about their training to call it “performance” represent only a small fraction of the Super Bowl audience. The broad viewership of the Big Game may make it logical and, dare I say, worth the money for brands with mass target audiences – beer, fast food, movies. If Under Armour's call-to-arms was indeed intended to speak to the serious athlete, it was wasted on a crowd that's more into wellness and the fun of sport.

And Under Armour's target audience was missed not only by the medium but also by the message. In my research in the health and fitness category, I've found serious athletes are motivated by competition and winning – they're not out to change the world, much less take it over, as Under Armour's ad suggests. And they consider their bodies finely tuned instruments, not the lemming-like “prototypes” featured in the spot.

This brings me back to my original point. By creating the spot, Under Armour put an inspirational stake in the ground for a company with its sights on taking down established players. Coming together to change the world is a powerful vision for the company. Kudos to Under Armour's leadership for getting their folks so pumped up.

But the strategy, medium, and message that motivate employees do not necessarily apply to customers. Under Armour's spot is a powerful internal corporate video. Not an ad.

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The logo for Denise Lee Yohn features three small circles of varying shades (grey, light grey, and teal) stacked vertically to the left of the name "denise lee yohn" in a lowercase, sans-serif font.

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