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How to Get the U.S. Military Into Your Super Bowl Ad for Free

By [Kyle Stock](#) February 04, 2014

The advertising industry is a frenzy of high-fives as creative shops of all sizes celebrate a round of Super Bowl plays that were arguably more interesting than the big game itself. But one very large agency is flying under the radar, already focused on even bigger projects: It's called the Pentagon.

Any production that wants the blessing and cooperation of the world's largest military can usually get it. Just call one of a few [special liaisons](#) at the Pentagon whose job it is to streamline logistics and vet scripts for material that might make the U.S. armed forces seem less than honorable. *Pearl Harbor* [made the cut](#); *Apocalypse Now* [did not](#).

The Pentagon's "entertainment" detail handles [requests from Hollywood producers](#), but lately corporate ad shops have been calling, too. And the appeal of the military for advertisers remains on the rise. John Marshall, senior partner at Lippincott, a New York-based brand-strategy and design agency, said in an e-mail that the military is one of the few U.S. institutions that has garnered an increase of trust over the past 40 years, vs. backsliding institutions such as Congress. "The fine line, of course, is whether or not the brand is an authentic partner or viewed as merely borrowing equity," Marshall explained.

During last year's Super Bowl, Chrysler's Jeep made a big impression with [an ad featuring Oprah](#) talking about welcoming home veterans. This year Anheuser-Busch InBev ([BUD](#)) took a similar tack with a [documentary-style ad](#) featuring Lieutenant Chuck Nadd as the U.S. Army helicopter pilot returned from Afghanistan early this month. In addition to the game-day crowds, that spot has been viewed almost 9 million times on YouTube ([GOOG](#)).

Budweiser Vice President Brian Perkins says many of the commercial's production details, including finding an appropriate subject, were handled by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, a nonprofit group with close ties to the military. "I'll be honest; it wasn't easy," Perkins says. "Normally, if you're using actors, you hire them. This was finding a real guy in a specific window of time."

The military is generally happy to help create these moments, [free of charge](#). If the Pentagon likes the project, it will even rent out war hardware, although fees can get steep for such things as fighter planes.

In return, the military burnishes its own brand and helps drive recruiting. (When *Top Gun* premiered in 1986, the Navy [posted personnel](#) outside theaters to capture any would-be Mavericks looking to sign up).

Denise Lee Yohn, author of [What Great Brands Do](#), says the military has a particular fondness for football

because it is followed so closely by young men. That's one of the reasons the Pentagon green-lighted a pre-game flyover that cost about \$100,000, [according to Politico](#).

For any company looking to trade on patriotic bonhomie—say, a certain Belgium-based beer empire—the partnership presents a pretty good deal. Scarlett Johansson, Bob Dylan, Ben Kingsley, and the handful of celebrities featured in Super Bowl ads probably collected handsome paychecks. Lieutenant Nadd got a parade in his hometown and a couple of tickets to the game.

Budweiser's effort was classy and restrained. There was nary a beer bottle in the commercial, just a bunch of giant draft horses and an old-fashioned Budweiser wagon. The company also gives generously to the Folds of Honor Foundation, which provides scholarships for the children of wounded and killed soldiers. "Budweiser is one of the most authentic brands in the world and this is a very authentic story," Perkins said. "No actors; one take; and every emotion you see on those faces is real."

Yohn says Budweiser was particularly savvy to focus on emotions. "It's really nothing to do with the product," she said. "They're just trying to make you feel really good about the brand and what's a better way to do that than show a soldier's homecoming?"



[Stock](#) is an associate editor for Businessweek.com. Twitter: [@kylestock](#)
