

GoDaddy pulls puppy parody ad as the fur flies

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GoDaddy has pulled a controversial ad from the Super Bowl after tens of thousands of people protested the commercial's subject matter. The ad features a puppy who is to be sold online, which animal rights advocates say promotes puppy mills. VPC

(Photo: GoDaddy)

Good bye Deflategate. Hello Puppygate.

With the Super Bowl just four days off, a dogfight had been developing between two of the game's veteran advertisers – Budweiser and GoDaddy – for pre-game eyeballs and buzz for their dueling ads featuring oh-so-cute puppies.

But just as the Bud ad went online, GoDaddy appears to have run off already with its tail between its legs. The website service pulled its ad about showing a greedy puppy mill owner who seems eager to quickly ship off a lost puppy after it's found.



The ad – a snarky parody of Budweiser's heart-warming lost puppy ad – ignited a social media firestorm among animal activists and puppy lovers and left GoDaddy to reach into its bag and try to find another commercial to air in the game.

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Meanwhile, executives at Anheuser-Busch on Wednesday told USA TODAY that they do not believe there will be any confusion with the GoDaddy ad and still plan to air their 60-second "Lost Puppy" ad on Sunday.

"Budweiser has no concerns about airing 'Lost Dog' during Super Bowl XLIX," said Brian Perkins, vice president, Budweiser, in a statement. "The animals in our story were treated with the utmost respect and care, and the message is positive and uplifting: your true friends always have your back"

SUPER BOWL XLIX AD METER

[Budweiser's big 'Lost Dog' Super Bowl commercial premieres, and it's adorable](#)

GoDaddy officials declined requests for comment. On Tuesday, GoDaddy CEO Blake Irving posted an apologetic note on his blog explaining that GoDaddy was pulling its puppy mill spot because "we underestimated the emotional response" on social media.



With advertisers paying a record \$4.5 million for each 30-second Super Bowl slot, decisions about how to attract eyeballs before, during and after the game all are critical. Each advertiser is looking for virtually any public relations opportunity that leverages the big expense.

Post by [USA TODAY](#).

One communications consultant says that Budweiser and GoDaddy are at opposite ends of the Super Bowl marketing spectrum.

"GoDaddy got it wrong and Budweiser got it right," says Daniel Hill, president of Ervin/Hill Strategy, a communications specialty firm. "I think they're probably high-fiving at Anheuser-Busch today."

In the end, the puppy controversy will only "draw more attention to the Budweiser ad than it would have ordinarily received," Hill says.

But another branding guru says GoDaddy – no stranger to controversy over the years with its string of sexy ads – may also have gotten what it always has wanted: free buzz.

"GoDaddy has to like the PR," says Denise Lee Yohn, author of *What Great Brands Do*. For years, GoDaddy has relied on the "shock value" of its racy Super Bowl spots to draw attention. "This is really no different."

The A-B spot, "Lost Puppy," also is about a puppy on the run, but this puppy finds its way into a possible scuffle with a wolf. That's when the iconic Clydesdales show up and not only save it from the wolf, but return it to its very grateful owner.

Not-to-worry. The wolf and dog were filmed separately and a scene that appears as if they are meeting face-to-face was actually edited together in post production. The animal used in the spot is 90% wolf and 10% dog. And a team of wolf trainers was on-site at the ad shoot, as was a team of puppy trainers.