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Most realistic bowling game

February 2, 2011 7 min. Read the opinions expressed by entrepreneurs investors are their own. Brian Sharples, CEO of HomeAway Photo Credit: Brian Fitzsimmons Most young companies won't have the courage nor budget to spend millions of dollars on a Super Bowl ad. But for HomeAway Inc., which spent more than \$2 million on 30-second Super Bowl ads last year, it was a way to quickly enter the major leagues. Now he's preparing to run his second Super Bowl commercial and hoping for another touchdown. The company operates the world's largest network of online rental rental markets, including VRBO.com, HomeAway.com and VacationRentals.com. Its big marketing problem is that only a fraction of travelers consider booking rentals over hotels and resorts. We felt like the biggest player in the business that we really benefited from the upgraded profile category, said Brian Sharples, 50, ceo and co-founder of the six-year-old Austin, Texas-based company. HomeAway's revenue in 2009 was \$120 million and employs about 750 people worldwide. The company's history shows what calculated risk entrepreneurs can take when striving to score big marketing wins. And it shows that such risks can pay off when they are carried out strategically and intelligently. The first commercial featured Hollywood actors Chevy Chase and Beverly D'Angelo as the Griswolds, reprising their roles as an accident-prone family from the National Lampoon Vacation movies back in the 1980s. The ad, a 30-second spot during the third quarter of the big game, sent viewers HomeAway.com watch a short film featuring the Griswolds. More than 1 million people visited HomeAway.com within 24 hours of the Super Bowl, and traffic remained for the next two months. According to Sharples, this jump amounted to a 500% increase in traffic. Traffic remained for two months, Sharples said. It was very good for us. He declined to comment on the impact of advertising on revenue and reveal the exact price tag of the ad, but said the 30-second slot was worth about \$2 million last year. The company also had to pay Warner Bros. Films a large licensing fee for the rights to use the Griswolds, as well as pay the actors to appear. Sharples says HomeAway does not consider the pricetag a huge financial risk for the company, given that it has been reeling in \$120 million a year and venture capital support. The bigger risk, he said, is that the ad will flop and people wouldn't want it. But that didn't happen: Sharples says the ad has received good reviews. HomeAway used to think big. The company raised nearly \$500 million in venture capital, most before 2010, and acquired several more websites last year, including BedandBreakfast.com. He was also the subject of rumors last year that he to the initial public offering. What's more, the results of the commercial have HomeAway running another 30-second ad during the same quarter of this year's games. Games. Bold strategy Prior to the 2010 Super Bowl ad, HomeAway made minimal television advertising, relying mainly on search marketing and email marketing campaigns to attract traffic to its websites. The company tested television ads in the San Francisco market in 2008 to see if it could change the viewer's attitude to vacation rentals. The results of the survey were promising enough that they decided to continue more television advertising. The company and its media consultants eventually determined that, despite the huge costs, the Super Bowl was prime time for its first national announcement. At the beginning of February, there is usually the highest volume of travel bookings than at any other time of the year. In addition, Super Bowl advertising provide the best kick for the buck because they get exposure far beyond game day. They are long-awaited and written about blogs, social media and major publications. Viewers often pay as much attention to advertising as to the game itself. We've been in almost every story written about Super Bowl commercials, says Sharples. Last spring, the Fox television network approached HomeAway again about buying ads for this year's Super Bowl. It was a more difficult decision. The company did not mean a creative idea, as it did with the Griswolds. And 2011 Super Bowl ad rates have climbed about 30 percent, Sharples said. Company executives eventually decided to launch another ad, given the large increase in traffic of the previous ad. Although they spend significantly more on airtime, they spend less overall because they don't pay licensing fees. The ad features a mock secret agency called the Ministry of Detour and again supports the comfort of renting a vacation while pounding the troubles and discomfort of hotels. The ad, which can be viewed on HomeAway.com, features a test child who gets catapulted while his parents try to maneuver into their cramped hotel room. The slogan is why hotel when you can HomeAway? The purpose of the ad, Sharples says, is to drive traffic to HomeAway.com watch a short film and hopefully check out vacation rental listings. The online film will allow viewers to interact by setting it up. Sharples declined to reveal the full film content, but said viewers will be able to insert photos of themselves into the ad, while holiday home owners may have images of their home appearing in the ad. It is hoped that the social component of the ad will expand the exposure of advertising, he says. A closer look at the company's strategy provides some takeaways for other companies, given any big spike in advertising: 1. Make sure the timing and focus is correct. HomeAway won't run ads during the Super Bowl unless the deadlines were right in the mid-season travel booking, Sharples said. In addition, many people who Super Bowl take a leave of absence. It's wasted money if the audience and the right timing don't match the company's focus. Maximum impact. During the first Super Bowl ad, the company did not promote the ad ad before game day, because he wanted to build suspense. But that may have been a mistake, Sharples says. This year, the company created a buzz for its second ad by launching trailers for its Super Bowl ad on its website and YouTube. He issued a press release in mid-December about the upcoming announcement and launched the Ministry bypass Facebook page. The build-up of ads and short film and advertising campaigns stemming from it is just as important as a game ad, according to Sharples. You have to be willing to make much, much more investment than the ad itself, he says. 3. Be prepared for growth potential. If the ad is successful, it could lead to a surge in web traffic and business. Make sure you're ready. HomeAway spent more than \$1 million before the 2010 Super Bowl getting its technical infrastructure prepared for the huge influx of traffic. Sharples said many other companies with ads during the game have seen their websites crash. Related: What you can learn from Super Bowl Ads Super Bowl opportunities: A small company gets a lift from Dad Let's start with your first question: Yes, we're actually promoting drinking during the Super Bowl. Why not? It's still to say: Celebrate the New Year with protein shakes and broccoli slaw. It's the Super Bowl. You should be able to have a few too many cocktails without feeling weird about it. You have the rest of the week--heck, the rest of the year -- drink responsibly. (And as new research shows, a little booze every day is healthy. But this Sunday, let's have some fun. Why the drinking game? You can't just watch the Super Bowl and down a few dozen beers without complicating it with the rules? I think you could. You can also just throw the pork pulp onto the field and let the Seahawks and Patriots hit it. But it's not football. Football is the rules and regulations, on a rigid, uncompromising schedule; it's not anything going chaos. Your Super Bowl drinking should follow in this tradition. Do you want to drink when you feel like this? Do it in your own time, hippie. We had two simple criteria when designing our game. First, it can't be too long. Some of the other Super Bowl drinking games out there can be too complicated and challenging. (No one should be asked to cleavage because of a coin toss or these damned advertisements we can't and won't be fooled into caring about.) Our game has exactly 12 rules, one for every minute of the break. And secondly, our Super Bowl drinking game is designed for actual football fans. It's not for people who barely know which teams are playing, or who says things like Who's a guy with a sread who says all these crazy things in the news?, or who seem to know more about break performers than players on the field. It's for you guys who care too or maybe care is just the right amount. Have fun. And drink responsibly. Or, except for that, fall asleep on your buddy's floor. It's your holy day, we're not going to judge. And on Monday morning, when you feel like death, try our Hangover Cure workout. Download the Men's Health Super Bowl Drinking Game here. This content is created and supported by a third party and is imported to this page to help users provide their email addresses. You may be able to find more information about this and similar content on piano.io piano.io

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