

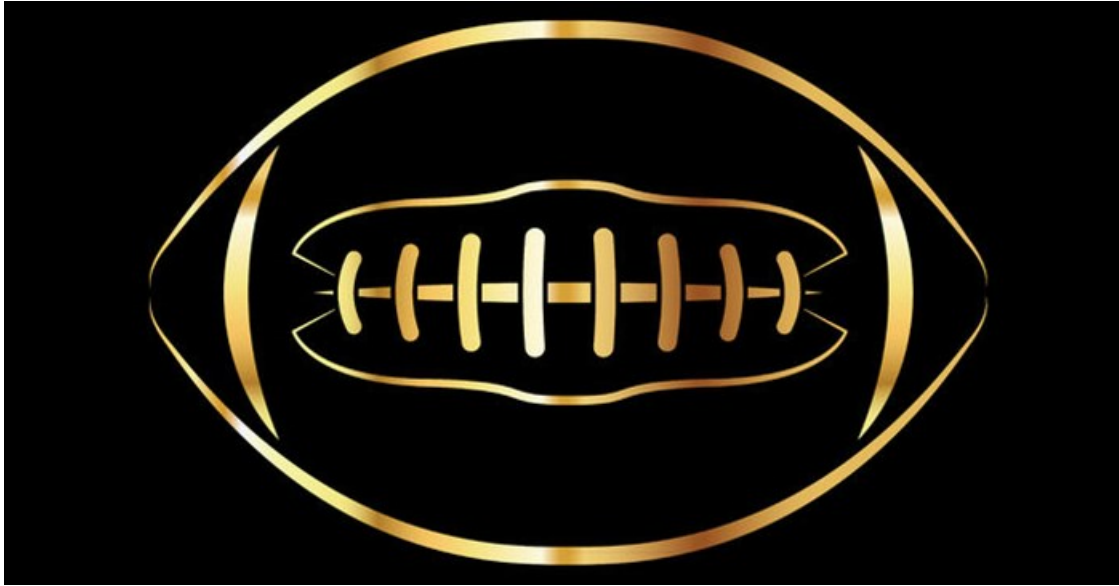
# The great comfort of bad Super Bowl ads

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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Quick, name your top 10 Super Bowl ads from this year. I know, it's a struggle. I am asking you to remember 10 out of a 100 or so ads whose sole purpose is to be memorable.

Each 30-second spot costs five million dollars to run. Each spot would have cost at least a million dollars to make. These numbers are considered a bargain because of the massive audience the Super Bowl attracts.



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These numbers also do something else: They create enormous pressure to deliver a great ad. And the truth is, year in and year out only about 10 percent are any good. As hit rates go, that isn't great.

Now, the easy explanation is 'the creative was no good'. Well, I will take a billion-dollar bet that there are better ideas sitting on the wall inside each agency involved. Ideas that are perhaps risky.

Ideas that don't just use yet another celebrity. Ideas that are actually ideas instead of wrapping.

Perhaps the agency couldn't sell them. Maybe the client couldn't buy them. What it proves though, is that all the money in the world doesn't make a good ad. What it proves is when the pressure comes no matter how big the committee, fear and bravery will always decide the outcome.

In a world of endless data and research, which should help guarantee a higher hit rate than 10 percent, we find many making average decisions because of the most human of emotions: Fear.

A large part of our industry is now in the business of trying to get rid of fear. Processes that try to get us to an acceptable answer rather than a great one.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, it is a strange anomaly in our industry that our screens are full of average, boring ads and nobody is nailed for it. There are a hundred explanations for why it was the right decision to make something nobody will remember.

Yet, the moment you try and push the boat out and you don't quite make it, you are crucified.

The great fear in our industry is that something will be weird. That seems to be a far greater sin than something being average. I humbly suggest that this attitude is what gets us to a massive 10 percent hit rate at the Super Bowl.

Bravery and courage. Words used in our industry on a daily basis like verbal confetti. I think we have to make those words mean something again. We need to inspire. We need to persuade. That is how you overcome fear. And fear will always be what we have to conquer to do great work.

The second reason the Super Bowl ads were so average is **Newton's first law of creative success**. A creative idea's success is inversely proportional to the amount of people who decide if it will be successful. And I can only imagine how many people were involved.

Once you have the dubious pleasure of presenting globally to 50 people around the world using tele-presence you realise you are no longer in the business of creativity but crowd control.

There is a silver lining in all this. The flip side for me is how it confirms my belief in a very simple formula for great work. The great Super Bowl ads were made up of three things: A great idea. A great relationship. A great execution.

Our industry probably lost its confidence over the last couple of years because so much was changing. And, there are people out there who have definitely drunk the wrong Kool-Aid and stopped looking at what is real.

The truth is, we should take great comfort from the Super bowl ratio because it's probably true for all advertising. 10 percent. Why?

Because it's bloody hard to make a great ad.

The comfort comes from knowing in 2017 the three ingredients have not changed. No matter how much money, people or process you have, they do not guarantee success.

What does however, is the perfect balance of creativity, trust and craft. Always has. Always will. And that will always be more of an art than a science.

*"I've searched all the parks in all the cities and found no statues of committees."* – Gilbert K. Chesterton

## ABOUT DAMON STAPLETON

Damon is regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia. Before that, ECD at Saatchi and Saatchi Australia, before that, group ECD of TBWA Hunt Lascaris and global ECD of Standard Bank. He has won over 500 awards internationally, including a D&AD Black Pencil, Cannes Grand Prix, Grand Clio, ADC Black Cube and most effective ad in the world by Warc 100. Damon is now regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia...

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