

Sonic Has Great Actors in Great Ads

It's Little Wonder Same-Store Sales Have Outpaced the Industry



(JULY 16, 2007) – If, like most Americans, you've been a loyal fan of AdReview for 22 years, you may believe we

have a singular obsession: the conveyance of a selling message.

Yes, it's a hobbyhorse of ours – and would that actual advertising agencies were as fixated on it as we are – but the fact is that brand differentiation, information and persuasion are not the things we get the biggest charge out of.

The thing we get the biggest charge out of is performance. That's right. For all our endless railing against the values of entertainment overshadowing the values of selling, what most excites us is when great dialogue and great acting (and direction and editing) combine with a great premise to produce a great commercial. Or, better still, a great campaign.

Doesn't happen very often.

Unless you live in the Sun Belt, in which case it happens many times daily, every time a Sonic ad comes on. Two guys, sitting in a car, at the drive-in:

Driver: I really like this Island Fire Burger.

Passenger: Mm. I didn't know it was going to be spicy.

Driver: Www ... why wouldn't you know that? It's called the Island Fire Burger.

Passenger: Yeah, I know what it's called. I just didn't know it was gonna be spicy.

Driver: (Staring in bewilderment) Island Fire ... What do you think they would do if ...

Passenger: You can move your head as much as you want. All I'm saying is I didn't know it was gonna be spicy.

As usual, the transcript does no justice to the delivery, which is simply hilarious. The actors are improv artists – the deadpan Peter Grosz and the excitable T.J. Jagodowski – who have done 115 of these video blackouts since 2003, playing two pals whose close friendship seems to be based on mutual contempt bordering on loathing.

Their whole relationship seems to be based on finding fault with one another, but the dialogue – improvised as it is – is so wonderfully unstilted and genuine that you just love them both.

Meanwhile, as you can see, they manage to keep the focus on the advertised goods. What details the boys don't cover is more than taken care of by the intercut voice-over and product shots – which, by the way, are as good as any fast-food photography out there.

That's half of the campaign. The other series involves improv-ers Molly Erdman and Brian Huskey as a married couple, also at the drive-in and also in a constant state of minor conflict:

Hubby: You know, I think you can tell a lot about a person by the drink they choose.

Wife: (skeptically) Really?

Hubby: Yeah, like mine's a blue coconut slush mixed with a little vanilla grape. Means I'm awesome. You've got a peach iced tea. What's that say about you?

Wife: (icily) That I'm an adult.

Hubby: (smirking) Exactly.

Wow. These people are soooooo married. And the series is so much fun, because every interlude conveys as much about the domestic condition as it does about Sonic's apparently scrumptious menu items. Not coincidentally, since Barkley, Kansas City, Mo., launched this campaign, the chain's growth and same-store sales have dramatically outpaced the industry.

So, like we were saying: It's all about performance.

