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Sit up and take notice

Dismissed by some as a declining sector for advertising, television can still get people's attention like no other medium.

A lot of advertising is very bad. But when advertising is good, it can be very good.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA ADVERTISING HAS COPPED A BAD rap in recent years. Its critics claim it is losing relevance in a fragmenting media world and insist that companies would be better off devoting their marketing dollars to more accountable areas such as public relations or online marketing. But every now and then an ad campaign comes along that proves the power of advertising and its ability to make people sit up and take notice.

A lot of advertising is very bad. But when advertising is good, it can be very good. It can also generate a response among consumers that a public relations or internet campaign can never produce. Consider three recent ad campaigns that appeared mainly on television, an advertising medium dismissed routinely by executives from rival media as a sector in decline.

Apple Inc has run some strong ads for its iPod MP3 player. However, the campaign it launched in February fell into a special, exclusive category: ads that make people stop what they are doing and pay attention.

The lead TV commercial used *Flathead*, a little-known and insanely catchy song by the British pop music band Fratellis, the silhouette of a man dancing (a familiar image in iPod ads) and bright, flashing colours to stand out in the crush of ads that are fired at consumers every day.

Many ads stand out. But few are as engaging and memorable as the *Flathead* ad for iPod, which was created by the Los Angeles-based agency, TBWA/Chiat/Day, and ran in Australia during February and March.

The impact and profile of the ad, which also ran on posters in bus shelters, belied the modest ad budget that Apple Australia spends on iPod. According to Nielsen Media Research, Apple spent \$7.2 million on media advertising for iPod in the year to March 31, up from \$5.6 million in the previous corresponding period. Of course, it does not need to spend a fortune: its ads have a lot more impact than ads backed by much bigger budgets.

While Apple uses flashing colours and an arresting tune to grab attention, Tourism Victoria and its agency Publicis Mojo have taken a more restrained, dignified approach with the "Lose yourself in Melbourne" campaign, which has been running since September last year.

But like the *Flathead* ad, the lead TV ad in the "Lose yourself" campaign is highly engaging. It is not quite an engaging as

the "Run, rabbit, run" ads Tourism Victoria used a few years ago, but it does force viewers to pay attention. (Publicis Mojo has held the Tourism Victoria account for 14 years and was reappointed in late April.)

The current ad features a woman running through downtown Melbourne following a big, unravelling ball of red rope. She eventually sees a line of blue rope, follows it and meets a man. The power of the idea lies in its execution. The ad is smart, sophisticated and quirky, mirroring the "brand attributes" of Melbourne that Tourism Victoria wants to sell. It is a rare beast: a retail ad that looks good and people want to watch.

The third campaign comes from Optus and its agency M&C Saatchi and is the latest instalment in a campaign they have been running since August 2005. The talking animals that Optus has been using in the campaign are given a new twist in the latest batch of ads, which include a giraffe asking for directions and a lion insisting to the police that he was not involved in a pub fight.

Optus has used animals in its advertising since 1999, sticking with them despite a change in agency (from George Patterson to M&C) in 2003. It has used the slogan "Yes" for longer, introducing it in 1992, turning it into "The power of yes" in 2002 and now using it as a write-off in all its advertising. While its arch-rival Telstra has jumped from one advertising strategy and look to another, Optus has been remarkably consistent.

Consistency is part of the Optus approach to advertising. Simplicity is another key part of its strategy. For the past 15 years, Optus ads have presented product benefits and promises in a simple way. The first talking animals campaign, "Give me the simple life" in 2005, had high production values but the idea behind it was simple and compelling.

The Optus, Apple and Tourism Victoria campaigns are very different in terms of their look, feel and objectives. But they share some common elements. They are engaging. They stand out in a sea of advertising. They make people pay attention. They prove that good advertising still exists. ●

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