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Television | Bill Carter

Frito-Lay and Fox Attempt To Outflank the Super Bowl

LOS ANGELES

EVERY year during the telecast of the Super Bowl advertisers seek to score more points than both teams put together. Because it is always the most-watched television event of the year, the game has become a showcase for new advertising campaigns.

Now, even making fun of the Super Bowl has become a marketing opportunity.

Looking for impact beyond what it could get by simply paying \$850,000 to buy a 30-second commercial in CBS's coverage of Super Bowl XX ' VI, which will be played a week from Sunday, Frito-Lay Inc., the maker of Doritos snack chips, has spent a comparable amount to buy all the commercial time on a special half-hour episode of the Fox Broadcasting series "In Living Color" - which will be broadcast the same night, beginning at the moment that the Super Bowl breaks for halftime.

The idea, which was announced last month, is calculated to play off the publicity blizzard that always surrounds the game. Much of that publicity is inherently repetitious, so a new gimmick always draws attention. Several years ago, for example, NBC received, enormous publicity for its "silent minute." The network provided 60 soundless seconds in its pre-game show to counter complaints about too much talk.

The reason Frito-Lay bought into the idea, *said*, Jerry Noonan, the company's *vice* president of marketing, is that it saw the special as a way "to break through 'all the clutter of the advertising world and to increase public awareness of a new Frito-Lay product, a bite-size version of two flavors of chips.

The show was brought to Frito-Lay not by Fox, but by Jay Coleman, the president of Entertainment Marketing and Communications International, who has previously paired products and entertainment outlets. He is responsible for matching a Michael Jackson video with Pepsi-Cola in a commercial campaign and putting commercials onto, movies on videocassettes for the first time. Like Pepsi, Frito-Lay is owned by PepsiCo Inc.

Perceiving the Super Bowl halftime to be "video wallpaper," Mr. Coleman said he first approached Fox in late 1990 about finding an entertainment special to go against it.

Fox was the logical outlet for several reasons, Mr. Coleman said. He mentioned the network's reputation for taking risks with programs but also emphasized that Fox was the only national broadcasting service that would be willing to take on the National Football League.

The other three networks have deals with the N.F.L. and broadcast the Super Bowl on a rotating basis, so each has a vested interest in not seeing the games' halftime ratings diminished. Fox has no deal with the N.F.L. and no immediate prospect of making one.

There was not enough time before last year's Super Bowl to bring the original idea off, Mr. Coleman said. But this year, he refined the idea, seeing "In Living Color" as the ideal vehicle because it normally is broadcast on Sunday night and because as a sketch comedy, it would easily play off the game.

It could also be flexible in its starting time, and indeed the show will be broadcast live for the first time in the Eastern and Central time zones. (The show will be broadcast at its regular time Sunday night in other parts of the country.)

"In Living Color" is also considered ideal because it attracts a large number of younger male viewers, a principal audience for the Super Bowl and a primary market for Doritos.

Mr. Coleman brought the concept to Keenen Ivory Wayans, the star and executive producer of "In Living Color." Mr. Wayans said he thought it was great. Fox agreed.

So, instead of watching marching bands and highlights of the game's first half, viewers can turn to "In Living Color" for comedy sketches that include the show's familiar characters from the "Homeboy Shopping Network" looting the players' lockers, as well as those portraying the outrageously gay movie critics of "Men on Film" switching for one night to "Men on Football."

CBS is not quaking under the threat, however. The network has done nothing different to add appeal to the halftime show, although the N.F.L. has. The league is adding the singer Gloria Estefan to a halftime lineup that includes the figure skaters Dorothy Hamill and Brian Boitano.

CBS is obliged to broadcast the 12minute on-field show. But it plans to use the rest of the half-hour break for a recap of the first half and promotion of its own. CBS will go live to Albertville, France, for a preview of its Winter Olympics coverage, scheduled for next month.

George Schweitzer, the senior vice president of marketing for CBS, said the network was far from fearful about losing viewers to Fox. "We're thrilled there's so much interest in our Super Bowl," he said.

But it is the boldness of taking on the Super Bowl that has inspired the Fox effort. "It's a very bold thing to do," Mr. Wayans said, "We understand what the Super Bowl is."

Mr. Noonan said boldness was part of the marketing strategy because Doritos was already perceived as "kind of a bold product"

Frito-Lay has just begun a large-scale promotion for the show, using radio and print advertising and a \$1 million game, with the grand prizewinner to be drawn by Mr. Wayans at the end of the special telecast.

Mr. Noonan said he thought at first that Frito-Lay might be taking something of a risk but he said, "We're starting to feel confident that it's going to come off."

Mr. Coleman noted that a repeat episode of "In Living Color" received a 10 rating against last year's Super Bowl which received a 41.8 rating on ABC. He said he thought the special could do as well as a 15 rating this year. Currently, a rating point represents 921,000 households.

"The Super Bowl is watched by 120 million people," he said. "If we could even get a third of them to turn over, to us, it would be tremendous."

Mr. Noonan said that depending on the results, Doritos might come back at halftime next year. But the results include not just ratings. "We want this to be talked about," he said. "We hope the next day people say, 'Hey, wasn't that a great game, and did you see what those other guys did at halftime?'"



"In Living Color" will battle the Super Bowl's halftime for ratings with comedy sketches like one in which Damon Wayans, left, and David Alan Grier play the outrageously gay critics of "Men on Football."