

<http://www.adweek.com/news/advertising-branding/taco-bell-saving-one-its-biggest-product-launches-super-bowl-surprise-169273>

Taco Bell's CMO on the Brand's Big Super Bowl Reveal and Taking It 'Beyond One TV Commercial'

Marisa Thalberg wants the buzz to last after the Big Game By David Gianatasio

- February 1, 2016, 8:18 PM EST

- Advertising & Branding

-



Taco Bell's last Super Bowl spot was a salute to octogenarian debauchery in 2013.

Taco Bell has created plenty of pregame buzz around its Super Bowl spot without revealing very much at all. The Yum! Brands fast-food chain teased its first appearance since 2013 with a cheeky Jan. 7 press release. While much of the text was comically redacted, we do know that a 30-second spot from Deutsch L.A. will air during the first quarter, touting one of Taco Bell's "biggest product launches to date." And, well, that's about all the chain's said so far. Conjecture has run rampant. Will the big reveal be the Quesalupa—like a chalupa, but much, much cheesier? Taco Bell has been testing that item in some markets. Still, the company insists that it won't say which "food innovation" will bow in the Super Bowl until game day.

We asked Taco Bell's Marisa Thalberg, promoted to chief marketing officer a month ago—after spending her first eight months at the company as head of brand engagement—to dish about what viewers can expect.

Adweek: The redacted press release was a masterstroke—it's generated plenty of hype beyond a single half-minute spot.

Marisa Thalberg: I think it's important to note that we didn't start with the goal of "Let's be a Super Bowl advertiser." For us, this is about having the right big news launching at the right time. We thought we could have a lot of fun introducing it in the biggest game, and biggest media event, of the year. Here's the one clue I'll give you about the campaign: Our partners at Deutsch came up with a great insight a while back, that Taco Bell has at times legitimately ascended to the very top of the pop-culture pyramid—a pipe dream for most brands. So we felt that gave us a right to play there, genuinely and a little whimsically. If you think about that insight, you know how we connect with our fans has to go beyond one TV commercial.



Marisa Thalberg

Any worry that, with so much pre-game hype, the commercial, or the food item, will be anti-climactic?

I think my best answer here is, nope!

How does Taco Bell keep the good vibes and buzz going after the game?

If you look at the arc of buzz around many Super Bowl advertisers, it has a sharp decline within a few days following the game. However, the Super Bowl is simply our launching pad for our big new food innovation—that shall not yet be named. We are all focused on having this just be the start of the excitement. Keep an eye out for us a week later on the Grammys, for instance.

So, the Super Bowl ad will be—what? Funny? Absurdly funny? Face-meltingly funny? With celebs? Animation? F/X?

I'd rather under-promise and overdeliver—but think fun, and very clever. That's all I'm giving.

Does having a Super Bowl ad air a few weeks after becoming CMO put added pressure on you?

Being in the Super Bowl is a dream for a CMO.

TACO BELL® TO UNVEIL WHAT COULD BE ITS BIGGEST FOOD CREATION YET DURING SUPER BOWL® 50

The new [REDACTED] to be featured in the brand's :30 commercial

IRVINE, Calif., Thursday, January 7, 2016 –Taco Bell® today announced that it will unveil the national launch date of the highly anticipated [REDACTED] with a :30 spot during Super Bowl 50. This is the first time in [REDACTED] history that a [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] are coming together – and it's happening on [REDACTED]. For those who can't wait until [REDACTED] to try the [REDACTED] Taco Bell is inviting fans to join in the excitement by [REDACTED] the [REDACTED] on Ta.co starting February 1. To the delight of [REDACTED]-lovers everywhere, [REDACTED] will be available February 1 days [REDACTED] its [REDACTED].

“We can't wait to share the [REDACTED] with [REDACTED]”, said Chris Brandt, Chief Concept and Brand Officer for Taco Bell Corp. “We've taken delicious [REDACTED] and placed it [REDACTED] to create the next craveable food innovation you can only get at Taco Bell. After months of [REDACTED] it's finally time for everyone to get the chance to try the new [REDACTED] for themselves.”

The spot marks Taco Bell's return to the Super Bowl after three years. The :30 spot, entitled [REDACTED], was created by Deutsch LA and will run during the first quarter.

Taco Bell announced its Super Bowl return with this comical press release.*Courtesy of Taco Bell*

Generally speaking, what makes a great Super Bowl commercial?

The Super Bowl represents a rare magic moment for marketers where people are actually leaning forward and ready to embrace advertising as opposed to rejecting it. This is actually an excellent reminder that even in our highly fragmented media world, great storytelling remains the best way to break through. As such, I think advertising that rewards consumers for being smart, with an idea that isn't gratuitous but makes you legitimately smile, feel something and/or surprises you in a good way—that wins. Also, the idea needs to feel right coming from the brand that does it. On a business level, it's a poor—not to mention extremely expensive—investment if your commercial doesn't leverage this massive audience to incite action.

Do you have any favorite Super Bowl ads?

I will risk lapsing into cliché here, but I'm going to answer this with the spots that remain memorable to me without even having to think hard about it—and that's significant in and of itself. I loved the nuanced emotion of the classic Coca-Cola "Mean Joe Greene" spot, and, more recently, Volkswagen's "Darth Vader kid" spot. I also absolutely loved that when Google made its first foray into TV a few years ago, it was so simple and artful with their "Parisian Love" story. Perfection. For just being epic, who can forget Apple's iconic "1984" spot? On a more humorous side, I thought the way Snickers used Betty White was fabulous. Interestingly, all of these show at least an implicit understanding of the cultural zeitgeist.

Can you think of any you especially dislike?

Let's just say I have a real disdain for lowest common-denominator jokes. Fans of the game and fans of advertising deserve better.