

“Not Quite Accurate” Rob Lowe

By Reg P. Wydeven

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In today’s technological world, I don’t see many commercials. Because of our busy schedules, I can’t watch my favorite shows live so I record them on our DVR.

After everyone else has gone to bed, I get a chance to catch up on ‘Sleepy Hollow’ or ‘The Americans.’ Watching on the DVR, I can fast forward through the commercials, which is especially great given the suspense involved in these programs.

The last month or so, however, was consumed by watching basketball: first the Big Ten and other conference tournaments, and then the NCAA tourney (from which my heart is still broken). During the live games, I couldn’t fast forward the commercials. Because I was stuck watching the ads, I appreciated ones that made me laugh.

One such campaign featured Rob Lowe and one of his unusual alter egos promoting DirecTV. In the spots, suave, successful Rob Lowe would explain the many benefits of being a DirecTV customer. Meanwhile, less successful versions of him, such as “far less attractive-,” “bad decision-,” and “crazy hairy-Rob Lowe,” would describe their less than satisfactory service from cable. At the end of each of the commercials, cool Rob Lowe tells customers, “Don’t be like this me. Get rid of cable and upgrade to DirecTV.”

Most of the ads were pretty funny, or at the very least, disturbingly entertaining. Comcast, however, was not amused.

The cable juggernaut filed a complaint with the Better Business Bureau National Advertising Division, claiming the DirecTV commercials were inaccurate and intentionally deceptive. Among their assertions, DirecTV proclaims their service has 99% signal reliability, is up to 1080p HD programming, has better picture and sound quality than cable, gets more sports programming than its competitors and shorter customer service wait times than cable and is even rated No. 1 in customer satisfaction.

The BBB predominantly agreed with Comcast and asked DirecTV to pull the ads or at least correct them. After investigating, the consumer watchdog group was unable to substantiate the claims that DirecTV has better picture and sound quality than cable or that they had more sports programming. The BBB was also unable to find support for DirecTV’s customer service claims.

The agency also took issue with Rob Lowe telling viewers not to “be like this me,” because it “conveyed a comparative and unsupported superiority message.” The BBB was able to verify that DirecTV did have 99% signal reliability and up to 1080p picture.

In response, DirecTV contends that it “continues to believe that the various Rob Lowe advertisements are so outlandish and exaggerated that no reasonable consumer would believe that the statements being made by the alter-ego characters are comparative or need to be substantiated.”

The Federal Trade Commission, however, does believe Rob’s alter egos. Last month, the FTC ruled that DirecTV also failed to make clear that its \$19.95-a-month plan requires a two-year contract and that customers must proactively cancel free premium channels, like HBO and Showtime, that were included with the first three months of the package.

Finally, the International Paruresis Association has also asked that DirecTV pull its “painfully awkward-Rob Lowe” ad, which features him being unable to urinate in a public restroom. The IPA supports people with “shy bladder syndrome,” which the group estimates affects 7% of Americans.

DirecTV has abandoned the Rob Lowe campaign and instead now uses a swimsuit model astride a talking horse to tout their merits. If DirecTV thinks a beautiful woman in a bikini and a comical horse are going to cause us to forget about their offensive Rob Lowe commercials, they are almost certainly right.

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