



On the Spot

The Best Ads of the Year? Really?

By Kyle Hagen

The 49th Annual Clio Awards ceremony was held in a Miami hotel recently, and accordingly, the ad world held its collective breath as envelope after precious envelope was torn open.



Or maybe not.

See, the Clios are kind of like the Oscars, except that they're given for excellence in advertising, and given the fact that plenty of people

don't even give a hoot (to put it politely) about the Oscars these days, I'd imagine that even some ad folk ignored their own industry's recent wallow in self-congratulatory spectacle.

That said, the event did provide some interesting fodder for your humble correspondent. After all, I've set myself up here as an arbiter of all that's good and commendable (not to mention lame and damnable) in the world of advertising, and the Clio Awards basically consist of the ad world rendering a collective judgement against itself. Would I agree with the judges' choices regarding the best and brightest representatives of hucksterism over the past year? Would you? Let's find out, shall we?

Hmm...

So, you know how sometimes you get an idea for something that seems pretty good and relatively straightforward, but then it turns out to be considerably more complicated than you anticipated? "The best laid plans of mice and men..." and all that jazz? My idea for this column seems to be a case in point.

See, I had figured I could just go to the Clio Awards website and peruse maybe five or 10 nominees per category and then pick a few interesting ones to write about. Only problem is, the [inaccurately named shortlist](http://www.clioawards.com/shortlist/index.cfm?medium_id=1) [http://www.clioawards.com/shortlist/index.cfm?medium_id=1] for a single category includes well over a hundred entries. Worse yet, I'd figured the site would conveniently allow me to click on and watch each entry right there. Not so. Apparently, I'd have to search elsewhere for each clip individually, and a quick look at YouTube indicates that not all the ads have found their way

there yet.

In short, this isn't going to work out quite as easily as I'd planned.

But at least now I know how the people who ran the 1991 Clio Awards show must have felt. Back then, in what surely must rank as one of the [most memorable](http://www.follisinc.com/themost.htm) [http://www.follisinc.com/themost.htm] awards shows ever, Clio or otherwise, the night's presenter was apparently busted on drug charges only hours before the event, the head caterer was drafted to take his place, and, after the list of winners was lost and the show abruptly abandoned, a horde of ravenous ad execs descended upon the table of unclaimed statuettes like so many brides-to-be at a wedding sale free-for-all.

So, who says awards shows have to be boring?

Forging Ahead

Anyhow, the star of that bygone debacle, in my mind, has to be that caterer who attempted to fill the void left by the "otherwise engaged" emcee. Even if his efforts were ultimately feckless, and the evening ended in utter chaos, his valor in the face of disaster is worthy of admiration and emulation.

Accordingly, after that rather lengthy digression, I shall press on with this hobbled-but-still-standing commentary. But rather than try to look for winners amongst the night's lengthy list of losers, I'm just going to look at the much shorter list of winners and approve of/scorn/shrug at some of those. Oh, and I'm going to skip the "Poster," "Billboard," "Radio," etc., categories, not because there's not some interesting stuff in those but just because the "TV/Cinema" category remains the flashy pinnacle among the various media.

So first, the scorn: An [All-Bran commercial](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwX8MzOKOzI) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwX8MzOKOzI] about pooping wins a Gold?! Look, I'm not saying that the sight gags here aren't



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mildly amusing or that the message might not inspire at least some, uh, “clogged” individuals to rush out and buy All-Bran in a desperate attempt to “unload the dump truck,” but c’mon, is this really one of the best commercials the ad world “produced” over the last year?

Worse yet, while the gag might be funny to some, isn’t it just as likely to offend more prudish viewers? And do you really want to conflate your food product with bowel movements? Not exactly the most appetizing association. And finally, how many bowls of All-Bran would it take to equal just one bowl of [Super Colon Blow](http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://snltranscripts.jt.org/89/pics/89ecolonblow2.jpg&imgrefurl=http://snltranscripts.jt.org/89/89ecolonblow.phtml&h=98&w=130&sz=5&hl=en&start=3&um=1&tbnid=w0_YVA-0xqzTAM:&tbnh=69&tbnw=91&prev=/images%3Fq%3DSuper%2BColon%2BBlow%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26sa%3DNJ?) [http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://snltranscripts.jt.org/89/pics/89ecolonblow2.jpg&imgrefurl=http://snltranscripts.jt.org/89/89ecolonblow.phtml&h=98&w=130&sz=5&hl=en&start=3&um=1&tbnid=w0_YVA-0xqzTAM:&tbnh=69&tbnw=91&prev=/images%3Fq%3DSuper%2BColon%2BBlow%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26sa%3DNJ?]

And now for a shrug: [This ad](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTtpFmgBmTI&feature=related) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTtpFmgBmTI&feature=related] for Louis Vuitton is beautifully shot, but it ultimately amounts to a whole lotta nothin’. We see plenty of exotic locales and misty, mystical environs, but with a running time of well over two minutes, the clip ultimately gets kind of boring. I mean, there’s no story here at all, just a bunch of pretty-looking places. Add to that the fact that a smart traveler would be more likely

to take a sturdy backpack to most of those places than some hoity-toity Louis Vuitton luggage, and the commercial basically comes across as a confusing, muddled mess (cinematography excluded).

And finally, a nod in agreement: Call me a sap, but “[Tan Hong Ming in love](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McfJeL7GKTW),” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McfJeL7GKTW] a sappy PSA from Malaysia, is pretty hard not to like. Not only is the goofy young star incredibly amusing, but the spot makes a very valid, if strikingly simple, point about racism: little kids who grow up with other little kids of different ethnicities are usually pretty unlikely to show the racial antipathy that far too many adults, for whatever reason, seem all-too-capable of incubating and sustaining. Again, it’s a simple message, but TV is best for conveying simple messages anyhow, and just because a message is simple doesn’t mean it’s not right.

Cheers, then, to the producers of this Gold-winning entry, one of those rare spots that can make even my cynical, grinch-like heart swell just a little. Bravo.

That said, I think I’ll go ahead and maintain my grinch-itude towards the Clio Awards as a whole, at least until fewer poop-gag commercials get the Gold, or perhaps just until I win one myself.

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