

Advertising on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart"

Eric Harris
JOMC 170
December 10, 2003

According to the Cable Television Advertising Bureau Web site (www.cabletvadbureau.com) Comedy Central is the fourth most frequently watched cable network among households with an annual income of \$75,000 or more. This makes it a lucrative network for advertisers—especially for those targeting an upscale audience—to purchase commercial spots. Relevant statistics from the Media Market Guide say that the Comedy Central audience is made up of 60.1 percent males, 39.9 percent females, has a median age of 34, with core viewers ranging in age from 25 to 34. Despite the late news daypart (11 p.m. to 11:30 p.m.) the Daily Show seems to be a prime program for advertisers with a target audience of mostly males between 18 and 49 years old. It's hard to say how many people are actually watching this program on a daily basis without buying the ratings data from Nielsen but I would estimate that of the 98.9 million households that have TVs in the U.S., that the Daily Show might have an audience share of about 7 percent of these households (6.9 million). If this estimate is roughly correct this show would have about a 7 rating. This means that, with a cost of \$4,050 per point (the cost listed for a spot on Comedy Central at this time by the Media Market Guide), the cost of one 30-second commercial spot is about \$28,000 on this particular program. This is very cheap compared with primetime costs on network television but that's because of the lower ratings. Of course the sacrifice of a larger audience for a more specific and defined audience can be a benefit to advertisers if they are targeting the right group of consumers.

The advertisers who support this program are not all concerned with one target audience across the board, because the program reaches such a broad age range. There is an obvious variation from one commercial to the next in the intended age group it targets.

The first obvious market that is targeted by some of the commercials is the college age, lower income demographic. Cell phone providers (Cingular, AT&T Wireless, and Verizon), Credit Card companies (Citi Bank, American Express, and Visa), collect calls (10 10 987, and 1-800-COLLECT), Greyhound bus fares, the U.S. Army, and video games were all advertised, probably with this younger group in mind. The cell phone, credit card, and collect call companies are almost always aimed at college age men and women because they are generally in a lower income bracket and are more susceptible and needing of these types of products. There are also iTunes.com ads included, undoubtedly aimed at this college audience. These advertisers have reached a very large group of college age students by advertising on this show as the statistics reveal and it is very likely that this makes these ads very effective. Skittles and Oreo had recurring spots on the program. It would make sense to advertise these to younger audiences since they tend to be less health conscious. The skittles commercial also featured young, college-aged actors hinting at their intended market. It's likely that these commercials are effective even though the skittles' commercial must have been somewhat expensive to produce. As to whether Greyhound spent its money wisely on these spots it is hard to say. This is a relatively affluent audience (median income is about \$58,000) so it is hard to imagine that a lot of the people tuning into this program are going to respond to the Greyhound ad. Even the younger ones probably have cars or at least parents wealthy enough to provide them with better means of transportation for long trips. Whether any U.S. Army TV commercial has ever induced a response from a viewer is debatable, but they've chosen the right age group to target. Considering the kind of show the Daily Show is (fake news), how many viewers are taking politics seriously enough to want to

join the armed forces? This is the wrong program for an Army commercial. The video games commercials may also be a little out of place for this market. These ads (The Simpsons “Hit and Run,” Spyhunter 2, Need For Speed Underground, Enter the Matrix, Catlevania, Killswitch and Soul Caliber II) are all probably relatively inexpensive to create but also may be targeted at such a small sliver of the show’s demographic that they are not that effective for overall response rates.

The next oldest target audience would probably include the core audience of 25-34 year-olds. With advertisements for things like AOL for Broadband, Time Warner Cable, Road Runner High Speed Online, Moen Faucets, Mr. Clean Auto Dry Car Wash and others that imply that the viewer is a head of their household it is clear that this is a highly recurring audience. These advertisements are not as focused on cost but instead on quality and reliability, making it more appealing to young working people with larger incomes, which this program’s audience certainly encompasses. These commercials seem inexpensive (probably no more than \$50,000) and are targeted to the right audience so they should be as effective as you could expect a television commercial to be. An overlap with this audience and the youngest segment may be the Kay Jewelers’ ads, which must be aimed at younger marrying-age people (20-30), and for inexpensive cars like the Nissan Sentra and Jeep. For the more settled and wealthier of this age range there are commercials for expensive digital cameras like the Sony Handycam Digital DVD camera, and the Olympus Camedia and Stylus 400 digital cameras. These commercials may have been a bit more expensive than the aforementioned household products but along with BMW, Mercedes Benz, The H2 (Hummer), and Korbel champagne commercials they are intended to generate high revenues from a more upscale audience

and thus the expenditures are justified. These upscale products are marketed most effectively to the older age group watching the show (probably the 34-49 year-olds) because these people would tend to have more money. Considering the claim that Comedy Central makes to the upscale, higher income audiences these commercials have a logical place in between segments of the Daily Show.

The prevalence of male viewers of this network (60 percent) is not neglected by advertisers. Commercials for the Braun Synchro and Remington Titanium electric shaver, amstel light and corona, Nivea lotion for men, the Black and Decker bullseye (electronic levler), Dick's Sporting Goods, Nike Shocks, and all the video games are all obvious appeals to the male consumers. Taking into account the large male audience these advertising dollars seem well spent, again with the exception of the video games which may not be as popular among any of the age groups that watch the show.

Every night the network took several opportunities to promote its own shows or products during commercial breaks. Most of the shows that were advertised come on near the time of the Daily Show, ranging from 10 p.m. to midnight, or were late-night specials. By their logic, its safe to guess that people watching Comedy Central late enough for the Daily Show might also be interested in watching some more of the quality programming that comes on around this time and be exposed to more of their accurately targeted advertisements. It's doubtful that the network had to pay anything to air these commercials above the small cost of creating them, so it is likely that these commercials were worth the trouble. DVDs of Southpark episodes were common commercials and were probably just as cost efficient and effective as the other Comedy Central affiliated advertisements.

There are commercials that could only go into a miscellaneous category, but in their presentation were clearly meant to entice a particular demographic. The Ricola commercial features a businessman (wearing a suit, holding a briefcase) walking down the street who is impervious to televisions falling on his head because he is made so strong by the incredible force of the Ricola lozenges. This commercial, and the Halls cough drop ad, is advertising a product specifically to an audience that parallels the Comedy Central core audience of 25-34 year-olds. Then the sporadic appearance of movie commercials like Something's Gotta Give, Matrix Revolutions, and Timeline are all presented using the more sophisticated trailers so that they appeal to the more sophisticated patrons of this program. Other programs like Fear Factor, That '70s Show, and Arrested Development advertised to this audience, apparently hoping to attract a similar demographic to their own time slot. Then there were commercials for healthy cereals like Post Shredded Wheat and Grape Nuts, Special K, and Fruit Harvest. Along the same health angle were Subway, Wendy's, and Nautilus Treadclimber commercials, all surely targeted at the older, more health conscious segments of the Daily Show demographic.

In all, most of the advertisements on this program were well suited to the broad audience that is attracted to it. My criteria of the effectiveness of these commercials are based largely on their individual presentations to specific age groups and psychographics and to the vast range of affluent people who watch the show. Considering the low cost of advertising to such a well-targeted market most of these advertisements are automatically effectual as long as they appeal to at least one segment of the audience.