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## Media Decoder

Behind the Screens, Between the Lines

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### 'Drinkability' Lands in the Drink as Bud Light Changes Plays for Super Bowl

By *STUART ELLIOTT*

A scene from a new Bud Light ad to air during Super Bowl XLIV on Feb. 7. Don't look for Bud Light commercials during Super Bowl XLIV on Feb. 7 to be centered on "drinkability," an attribute that the beer brand has spent more than a year promoting.

For that matter, don't look for the Clydesdale horses during any of the Budweiser commercials during the game, either.

The changes come after a shift atop the marketing ranks at Anheuser-Busch as well as a decline last year in sales for both Budweiser and Bud Light.

What Anheuser-Busch does or does not do on Super Bowl Sunday is always closely watched because it is the exclusive national beer sponsor during the game and it typically buys more time in the game than any other advertiser.

That part of the game plan is unchanged for Super Bowl XLIV as Anheuser-Busch intends to run nine commercials that will take up five minutes of air time. Of the nine spots, five are scheduled to be devoted to unveiling a new theme for Bud Light, "Here we go."

The new theme is intended to convey that Bud Light is "a catalyst for good times," said Keith Levy, vice president for marketing at Anheuser-Busch in St. Louis. "When Bud Light shows up, the party is going to begin."

Mr. Levy played down the significance of the disappearance of the drinkability theme.

"It's sort of a planned evolution," he said, as the concept remains "part of the brand."

The idea has been to balance rational reasons for buying Bud Light, which were conveyed as product qualities under the umbrella of drinkability, with reasons that would "connect on an emotional level," Mr. Levy said.

"In the beginning, the product attribute lever was pulled a little harder," Mr. Levy said, whereas now the emphasis is more on the fun of drinking beer.

The fun is certainly dialed up in the five Bud Light spots likely to be shown during the game, in ways that are intended to appeal to the target audience of men ages 21 to 29.

In one spot, a man's home is his Bud Light castle because the house is composed of beer containers.

In another spot, guys talk to each other on the phone in an unusual manner; the commercial is evocative of the "Whassup?" spots for Budweiser.

The other humorous Bud Light commercials include one in which a boorish man crashes a women's book club, another that spoofs "Lost" and a third about the reaction of scientists to news that an asteroid is about to crash into Earth.

The new Bud Light spots are by an agency in St. Louis named Cannonball that often works for Anheuser-Busch. The drinkability-focused commercials had been created by Euro RSCG Worldwide, part of Havas, and the Chicago office of DDB Worldwide, part of the Omnicom Group.

Although the two commercials during the game for Budweiser will not feature the Clydesdales, which have been a brand and company symbol for almost 80 years, that is "not unprecedented," Mr. Levy said, as they have been absent from Budweiser Super Bowl spots in previous years.

A spot with the Clydesdales was filmed, he added, but in testing with consumers the two other spots performed better. The last time the company ran Budweiser ads for the Super Bowl without the horses was 2001, according to a preliminary look at lists of past Super Bowl spots.

The two Budweiser commercials that are expected to appear both are focused on the idea of cooperation, collaboration and helping others. Neither is laugh-out-loud funny, but one is more light-hearted than the other. (Anheuser-Busch asked that specifics of those spots and the others be withheld until after viewers watch them during the Super Bowl.)

Both Budweiser spots, created by DDB, use a theme that was recently introduced for the brand, "It's what we do," which includes the highlighting of the word "we" inside the word "Budweiser."

The idea is to celebrate "friendship, camaraderie, bringing people together over a Budweiser," Mr. Levy said.

(Interestingly, that approach echoes a theme used decades ago for Budweiser, "When gentlemen agree.")

Another change from recent years is that Anheuser-Busch will expand the roster of brands to be advertised during the Super Bowl beyond its two mainstays, Budweiser and Bud Light.

Plans call for a spot for Michelob Ultra, featuring Lance Armstrong, who recently agreed to endorse the brand; the spot is created by Palm & Havas, in Chicago, a unit of Havas. And there are plans for a spot to introduce Select 55, a beer with 55 calories per 12-ounce serving that is meant to compete against MGD 64 from MillerCoors. The Select 55 spot is

created by Momentum in St. Louis.

This is the first Super Bowl ad line-up to be overseen by Mr. Levy. His longtime predecessor, Bob Lachky, the chief creative officer under whom Anheuser-Busch made the Super Bowl the centerpiece of its annual sales efforts, left the company at the end of February 2009.

Mr. Levy said he had “no trepidation” about being the brewer’s point man on the biggest day of the year for advertising as well as for football.

“At the end of the day, the consumer is the boss,” Mr. Levy said, rather than any Anheuser-Busch executive.

One policy of Mr. Lachky’s that is being followed in his absence, Mr. Levy said, is extensive testing of the spots that Anheuser-Busch intends to run during the game.

Another tenet of Mr. Lachky’s that remains unchanged is a belief that the Super Bowl is “the world’s largest advertising stage,” Mr. Levy said.

Anheuser-Busch is also continuing efforts to extend its Super Bowl pitches beyond Super Bowl Sunday. For instance, consumers can visit a Web site ([biggameads.anheuser-busch.com/](http://biggameads.anheuser-busch.com/)) and learn more about the making of the house spot for Bud Light.

Other beer brands are relegated to the sidelines during the Super Bowl because of the exclusive rights Anheuser-Busch has as the national beer sponsor, which continue through 2012.

For example, MillerCoors is promoting a spot for Miller High Life as part of “the big game” — but it will not be seen nationally during Super Bowl XLIV. Rather, MillerCoors is buying commercial time during breaks in the game on local stations in major markets.

The High Life spot, by Saatchi & Saatchi, part of the Publicis Groupe, continues a theme that promotes the brand as the choice of the “little guy” rather than wealthy, fancy-pants big shots.

The owners of four small businesses around the country will appear in the spot, along with the character of a Miller High Life delivery-truck driver who stands up for the everyday beer drinker.