

Do political ads work?

This year, we have been bombarded with political ads on TV, especially in swing states. I can attest to this since my TV DMA covers Northern Virginia, and Virginia is a swing state, so we have been seeing (too) many here in Maryland.

The spending is in the billions. Adweek reports: Political TV Ads Shatter Records. It's not over yet. According to Adweek, as of last week, 915,000 presidential ads have appeared. Add to that congressional and senate ads, and ballot question ads, and I would be surprised if you have seen even one commercial for Viagra!

In today's Washington Post, Ned Martel writes in the article "Could the campaign ads benefit from Mad Men touch" that the ads are not even that good. He says:

To advertising executives, this onslaught of attack ads looks like a giant waste of money. It certainly runs counter to every risk-conscious maxim the industry has honed since the days of "Mad Men."

Negative ads have been a staple of political campaigns forever. You want to discredit your opponent, that is understood. Unfortunately, this year especially (or so it seems...memories are short), we are seeing that not only are these ads negative, they are also factually challenged. Glenn Kessler, "The Fact Checker" writer at the Washington Post, today rated one of Mitt Romney's ads regarding Obama's so-called Apology Tour four Pinnochios (which means that this particular ad includes falsehoods).

We are seeing a lot of back and forth: Romney says one thing, and Obama answers it. And to add legitimacy, we are seeing the use of news footage. An Obama ad recently used footage from a 60 Minutes interview of Mitt Romney.

But does any of it make any difference in trying to reach the mythical undecided voter? I am not sure. I think it must have some impact but does it change minds? Do people watch the ads or do they tune them out? I don't know. What are your thoughts?

Super Political

Super Tuesday is here. There is a lot of media hoopla about this—ABC, CBS and NBC were discussing it non-stop during the morning news shows. All candidates have ramped up advertising for the primary, and Barack Obama even ran an ad during the Super Bowl.

Political advertising is tough, especially on a national level. You want to hit the right chord to get out your supporters, convert non-supporters and not alienate everyone else. Obama has to be very careful not to alienate Clinton supporters (and vice versa for Hillary Clinton with Obama supporters), because there is a potential ticket of Obama/Clinton to contend with after the presidential candidate is chosen.

Since I have only seen the Obama ad, I can only comment on that. His strategy is very clear: emphasize change to appeal to everyone disenchanted with the current administration AND to everyone who doesn't want to see Bill Clinton back in the White House. He is also working hard to appeal to the Millennials. This is wise—I think Millennials will turn out for this election, and of all the candidates currently out there, Obama probably has the most appeal.