



## DirecTV Told to Pull Rob Lowe Ads After Comcast Complaint

Published April 08, 2015 | Reuters

DirecTV's ad campaign featuring thesp Rob Lowe's alter-ego personas -- he's cooler and more confident as a subscriber of the satcaster, while creepy and lame as a cable TV sub -- should be discontinued, according to an advertising trade group.

The Council of Better Business Bureau's National Advertising Division, ruling on a complaint by Comcast, said DirecTV (DTV) should discontinue certain claims made in a series of TV commercials featuring Lowe.

Comcast challenged multiple DirecTV claims in the spots, including that "With DirecTV you get 99% signal reliability" and that customers would get the industry's "best picture quality and sound."

DirecTV said it would appeal NAD's findings. The company contended 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."

But the whole dispute appears largely academic, at this point. According to DirecTV, the company earlier this month discontinued the Rob Lowe campaign, launched last September, as previously planned. The satcaster's current spots feature Sports Illustrated swimsuit model Hannah Davis and a talking horse; she formerly appeared in DirecTV's ad campaign for the Genie DVR.

"The Rob Lowe campaign was always scheduled to end at the end of Q1 we wanted to launch our new campaign with Hannah Davis in the (NCAA men's basketball) Final Four," Jon Gieselman, DirecTV SVP of marketing and advertising, said in a statement. "We always reserve the right to bring back the Rob Lowe campaign, either in its current form or with new spots; it has been extremely successful for the brand."

NAD said it considered whether the ads at issue implied that DirecTV (DTV) offers superior signal reliability, picture quality, sound performance, more sports programming, and more prompt installation and service than cable companies, among other factors.

The group said that although "humor can be an effective and creative way for advertisers to highlight the differences between their products and their competitor's, humor and hyperbole do not relieve an advertiser of the obligation to support messages that their advertisements might reasonably convey especially if the advertising disparages a competitor's product."

Decisions by the NAD, as an advertising claims arbiter among voluntarily participating companies, are not legally binding. However, the group says it refers disputes to appropriate government agencies if offending advertisers don't comply with its recommendations.

The DirecTV ads featuring the love theme from "St. Elmo's Fire," in which Lowe costarred did not cite Comcast specifically. Following its review, NAD said it determined that DirecTV's testing substantiated its 99% signal reliability claim but that it recommended the company drop claims that it has better signal reliability, shorter customer service wait times and better picture and sound quality than cable operators.

In addition, NAD said that the claim "Don't be like this me. Get rid of cable and upgrade to DirecTV" which appeared at the end of the commercials conveyed a "comparative and unsupported superiority message." The DirecTV last fall was criticized by the International Paruresis Assn. for making fun of lame Rob Lowe's inability to pee in front of others in one spot, calling it insensitive to those who have "shy bladder."

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