

DirecTV ends ad campaign with Rob Lowe



Link to commercial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCPKLcM_O2Q

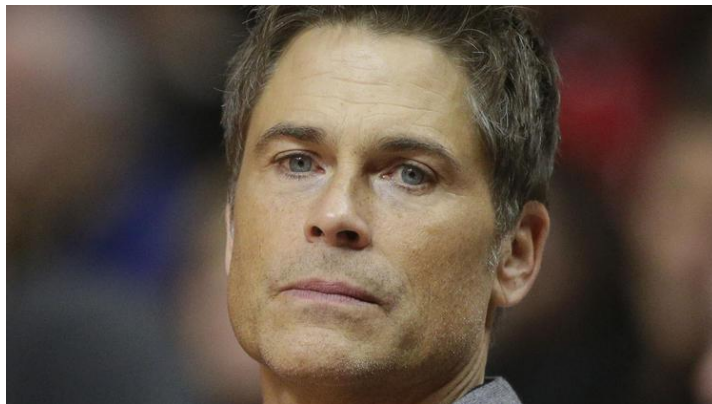
By **STEPHEN BATTAGLIO**

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Many television viewers know by now that actor Rob Lowe has DirecTV, and his alter egos — an array of neurotic losers, scary loners and outright degenerates — have cable.

DirecTV has ended the popular and highly effective ad campaign, moving on to a new series of spots last weekend that feature Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue cover model Hannah Davis and a talking horse. That's sad news for fans of Lowe's ads, but perhaps good timing for the El Segundo satellite TV provider.

On Tuesday, the National Advertising Division, a unit of the Council of Better Business Bureaus that reviews ads for truthfulness and accuracy, sided with a number of complaints about the Lowe ads from cable company Comcast. The group ruled that DirecTV should discontinue using a number of claims made in the campaign.



Viewers will no longer be seeing the Rob Lowe who has DirecTV. (Jae C. Hong / AP)

The NAD's recommendations included scrapping Lowe's signature line: "Don't be like this me. Get rid of cable and upgrade to DirecTV." The line, the group said, "conveyed a comparative and unsupported superiority message." The NAD also said there was no evidence to back up the claims that DirecTV had greater signal reliability, shorter customer service wait times and better picture and sound quality than cable.

Companies use the NAD to get a hearing on advertising claims they believe are unfair without resorting to litigation. If a company does not comply with a NAD recommendation, the case can be referred to the Federal Trade Commission.

DirecTV said in a statement that it would appeal the NAD's findings, adding that the company "continues to believe 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."

The humorous but aggressive approach with Lowe and the ensuing complaint demonstrates how brutal the battle for pay TV customers has become with the rise of cable and satellite cord-cutters who get their video content online.

"The category is not growing," said Jon Gieselman, DirecTV's senior vice president of marketing. "People are leaving pay TV. It's a share shifting challenge. We're trying to steal one another's customers."

Data show that the campaign's message was spot-on. In the third quarter of 2014, DirecTV lost 28,000 subscribers. In the following quarter, when the campaign started its run, the company gained 149,000 subscribers. The figure was a steep increase from the 93,000 who signed up in the fourth quarter of 2013.

In an age when half of all TV households have the ability to zip through commercials on their DVRs, Lowe's DirecTV spots resonated with viewers. They've run for free during the actor's TV talk show appearances. TV crews and magazines have gone behind the scenes to watch the makeup ritual that turns him into the depressing or disreputable cable-subscribing Rob Lowe he doesn't want you to be.

The first series of ads with Lowe show the Rob Lowe who subscribes to DirecTV describing the attributes of the service in glamorous, sleek settings. Those scenes alternate with his unappealing characters who have cable — Super Creepy Rob Lowe, Scrawny Arms Rob Lowe, who is unable to open a jar of mayonnaise, and a Broken-down Less Attractive Rob Lowe, who forlornly notes that cable "has pictures — and sound."

When the two Rob Lowes appear together on screen at the end of each spot, the real one says the signature line that the NAD deemed supportable.

One of Lowe's characters generated a well-publicized protest from the International Paruresis Assn. The group expressed its dismay that Painfully Awkward Rob Lowe is shown standing at a men's room urinal unable to relieve himself because there are other people around.

DirecTV declined the organization's demand to pull the spot, which it believed was insensitive to those who suffer from such an affliction.

The ads also inspired one of the most viewed Internet memes after Super Bowl XLIX, showing Lowe's face on the body of losing Seattle Seahawks coach Pete Carroll. It read: "I'm incredibly stupid Rob Lowe, I have the best running back in the NFL, but I passed the ball from the 1, and I have cable."

Angeline Close, an associate professor at the Stan Richards School of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Texas, said Lowe's stunning transformations are not only funny, but probably jolted consumers into considering the switch from cable to DirecTV.

"When you can shock people like that, it opens up your mind and you're more amenable to being persuaded by the message," she said.

Gieselman said the spots worked so well in the fall that ad agency Grey was commissioned to create five more with new Lowe characters — including Total Deadbeat Rob Lowe, who saves money by having surgery in a motel room — so they could continue running in the first quarter. But he added that the company planned to move to a new creative approach before the NAD ruling on Comcast's complaint, which was filed three months ago.

"We try to retire campaigns at their peak — before they jump the shark," Gieselman said.

Gieselman added that it's possible Lowe could return to DirecTV ads in the future. "We've talked with Rob about doing something else in the future," he said. "He loves the campaign. He's completely gotten into the characters."

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/cotown/la-et-ct-directv-rob-lowe-ads-20150407-story.html>