

What gives a Super Bowl ad shelf life in 2026

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For decades, the price tag to advertise during the Super Bowl has been justified by access to a centralized audience. As attention disperses across platforms and star power extends to creators, marketers are rethinking how Super Bowl investments translate into consumer recall.

To reach as wide an audience as possible, brands are now designing Super Bowl campaigns with a halo effect to circulate before kickoff, live alongside the game, and stick around on social afterward.

“I wouldn’t say it’s a quiet year for the Super Bowl, but it would be silly to say that brands haven’t been rethinking traditional spots in the last couple of years, with the Super Bowl being the priciest one of them all,” said Max Litke, director of talent partnerships at Millennial Entertainment.

How brands are showing up around the game

This shift is changing how brands participate beyond national airtime.

St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital is taking a peripheral approach to the Super Bowl this year, tapping creators to amplify its message. The NFL named creator Dhar Mann its Chief Kindness Officer, launching a “Be Kind To Your Rival” campaign that encourages fans to post compliments about competitors, with donations benefiting St. Jude.

“As a nonprofit, it’s hard to spend the kind of money that the Super Bowl costs, so we take a ‘surround’ approach,” said Samantha Maltin, chief marketing and brand officer at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.

With major events like the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics crowding the calendar, marketers are being more selective about where attention compounds.

“Brands want more than a spike in attention,” said Crystal Foote, founder and head of partnerships at Digital Culture Group. “They want sustained impact.”

What this year’s lineup signals about consumers

This year’s creative lineup maintains themes of levity and familiarity from last year’s game.

- In 2025, humorous spots accounted for 71% of ads, up from 62% in 2016, per iSpot.
- Nostalgia appeared in 26% of ads last year, according to iSpotTV.
- Musicians account for just 10.4% of celebrity talent payments in advertising but 20% of Super Bowl celebrity spending in 2025, according to XR data.

Rocket and Redfin’s spot featuring Lady Gaga taps into two of those threads at once, with the artist covering “Won’t You Be My Neighbor?” from “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood.”



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Making Super Bowl content stick

Brands can no longer assume a single celebrity will carry a message across audiences. Instead, they're pairing talent and cultural references to cover their bases. YouTube's Flag Football event, headlined by musician J. Balvin and creator Druski, is one example of how brands are chasing overlapping audiences.

That logic was clear in Fanatics Sportsbook's spot with Kendall Jenner, which leaned into the internet-fueled idea that the famous family destroys athletes' careers after dating them. The ad worked because it blended humor, celebrity, and a widely recognized cultural joke, said creator Carson Roney.

"Everyone knows about the 'Kardashian Curse,'" she said. "That was a perfect mixture of humor, celebrity, and using something that's trending."



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“They didn’t use a creator, but they did use a TikTok sound,” said Litke. “You might not know who Martha Stewart is, but you may say ‘That’s the TikTok sound I know and I love, and now you’ve got my attention.’”

The lesson is to find a creative approach that bypasses disjointed audiences and keeps people talking on social.

“The common thread isn’t about avoiding the spotlight,” said Foote. “It’s about choosing moments that are more actionable, more personal, and more measurable.”

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