

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

VOLUME 165, NO. 240

LAW BULLETIN MEDIA

World Series fluke moment helps Bud Light cash in on social media

Bud Light may have just ushered in a bold, new era of viral marketing. When a Washington Nationals fan took a home run ball to the chest rather than drop the Bud Light beer cans he held in each hand, the Anheuser-Busch beer brand seized the moment and turned it into a unique marketing opportunity in record time.

In the sports world, social media thrives on spontaneous occurrences that are captured and shared widely by fans on Twitter and other platforms. Bud Light capitalized on a moment that was tailor-made for the company and generated an estimated \$8 million in brand exposure, according to NBC.

Other brands will likely try to replicate Bud Light's success, but is it possible?

The setup couldn't have been more perfect for Bud Light if its marketing staffers had designed it themselves. The fan, Jeff Adams, allowed himself to be hit in the chest by a home run ball shellacked by the Houston Astros' Yordan Alvarez in order to hang on to his two Bud Light cans during Game 5 of the World Series in Washington, D.C. Even better, Adams was standing under a Budweiser "This Bud's for You" sign, wearing a gray shirt in a sea of Nats fans in red shirts.

A quick-thinking Bud Light employee saw the moment, which occurred at approximately 8:30 p.m. on a Sunday night and alerted the brand's marketing team. A little over 20 minutes later, Bud Light tweeted a clip of the moment and asked Twitter users for help contacting the fan.

By 10 p.m., Bud Light reportedly had designed a T-shirt with an image of the as-yet unknown fan being hit by the ball with the words: "Always Save the Beers."

Ironically, Adams was not active on social media but, as the clip went viral, word reached him that Bud Light was looking for him. He called the company on Monday morning. By the end of the day, Bud Light announced it was sending Adams to Game 6 in Houston wearing the



SPORTS MARKETING PLAYBOOK

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new T-shirt. An image of the T-shirt accompanied the announcement, ensuring it would be an in-demand item.

The next night, during Game 6, Bud Light aired a commercial featuring Adams and his viral feat — with the tag line "Not all heroes wear capes. Or gloves." — just 48 hours after it occurred. Adams was also in the stands watching his team tie up the series on its way to winning the championship, courtesy of the brand.

These days, it doesn't take much for a compelling video or photo to go viral on social media.

All Miami Marlins superfan Laurence Leavy had to do to become a viral sensation is attend every major professional sports event he can wearing an orange Marlins jersey. The Miami lawyer and Marlins season ticket holder has attended hundreds of sports events, including Super Bowls, NBA playoffs and World Series games and, in the process, has gained fans of his own who have made a

game out of spotting him.

Sports blog SBNation first wrote about the ubiquitous, but then-unknown fan in 2012, who ramped up his game attendance after a cancer scare. Leavy now has his own hashtag: #MarlinsMan. And, at the start of this year's World Series, a sports analyst for The Action Network made a point of tweeting that Leavy would be unable to attend Game 1 and 2 due to a health issue.

Turning a viral star into an advertising campaign is next-level marketing. Compelling viral moments have been used in advertising before, but never with such a fast turnaround.

For its March Madness campaign Pizza Hut decided earlier this year to resurrect a popular image of a 12-year-old boy's anguish during Northwestern's loss to Gonzaga during the NCAA Tournament in 2017, reported the Chicago Tribune. The company asked John Phillips, the son of Northwestern Athletic Director Jim Phillips, for permission to use the viral photo in a 15-second segment it called the "What-Just-Happened Wail."

Phillips' agonized reaction to a call that went against Northwestern in the final moments of a close game was highly relatable to college basketball fans who retweeted the photo more than 20,000 times back in 2017.

Now two years older, Phillips recognized the value of social media exposure and put the money Pizza Hut paid him to good use. He reportedly donated the sum, which he declined to disclose, to the company's charitable programs that provide food to families in need and books to underprivileged children.

With Bud Light's on-the-fly "Always Save the Beers" campaign, a new standard has been set for digital marketing that requires more than just a great idea.

Anheuser-Busch brands have a knack for creating memorable marketing moments that become part of pop culture, from

Budweiser's beloved Clydesdale team commercials to Bud Light's popular medieval king and his "Dilly, dilly!" catchphrase. Bud Light deftly changed "Dilly, dilly" to "Philly, Philly!" to lend support for perennial underdogs, the Philadelphia Eagles, in the 2018 Super Bowl, to the delight of Eagles and underdog fans everywhere.

The fact that the Eagles finally won their first Super Bowl that year confirmed the wisdom of Bud Light's choice.

Bud Light's latest advertising coup required fast thinking, decisive action and a little bit of luck too. Once the brand recognized a viral moment in the making, it

moved quickly to capitalize on it by engaging Twitter followers to help contact Adams, while making followers feel invested in the outcome. After Bud Light tweeted a clip of Adams' baseball-stopping moment, tens of thousands of people retweeted it.

Bud Light then ran with the campaign by creating a T-shirt and keeping Adams in the spotlight at the following game. The company's success can also be attributed to why the clip went viral in the first place—everyone likes a funny, feel-good sports moment. The organic, unscripted moment also appealed to a cynical public weary of manufactured "reality" shows.

Like many other brands, Bud Light has a "social listening team" that monitors online conversations and media mentions about the brand. It's clear from Bud Light's success with the "Always Save the Beers" campaign that social listeners will be watching and looking for distinctive moments in sports, on the field and in the stands, that can be used to promote the brand in new and spontaneous ways.

Will other brands be able to duplicate or build on Bud Light's example? Or was the brand just in the right place at the right time? Based on the estimated \$8 million in exposure, it's certainly worth trying to find out.