

# Christmas 2014: the



**Boots...** 'Modern life isn't rubbish. It's rather beautiful' (GH)



**Marks & Spencer...** 'well-handled and grown-up ad' (MK)



**John Lewis...** 'What I love about this film is how quickly it became the subject of umpteen spoofs' (DC)

It's that time of year again when the industry's great and good fight for Yuletide glory. *Campaign* asks three ad folk for their thoughts on this year's crop of festive campaigns

## Giles Hedger, global chief strategy officer, Leo Burnett



As a childish tribute to the Mulberry ad (the best of the crop this year, in my view), I thought I would describe each of these ads as though it were a gift being unwrapped in an atmosphere of unspoken competitiveness.

This first one is from **Tesco**. It's about lights. However much I rummage through the crumpled paper, it's still about lights. Just lights. Christmas lights. At Christmas. Hang on, though. Christmas lights are great. I love Christmas lights. My dad used to climb up into the attic like that. And wasn't there that hilarious scene in *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*? There's humility, a sense of proportion and a straightforward positivity about the whole thing that makes it very, you know, Tesco. It's beautiful to watch, too, and inescapably happy-making. A bit like watching supermarket fireworks in the back garden at home.

This next one also seems

to come from the world of real people. There are real people rushing to get home in time for something to do with Christmas. But it's the middle of the night. Now I see a branch of **Boots** in what looks like a deserted airport. So now I know it's from Boots. I see a tired face. Modern life is rubbish. Maybe she's a shift worker.

And then home she comes. OMG. Modern life isn't rubbish. It's really rather beautiful. They moved Christmas for Mum: I would move Christmas for my mum. I'd do anything for my mum. I want to tell her right now. Maybe not with a bottle of perfume from Boots, but I want to tell her. I think I just welled up.

Talking of people who want their mum, this next one is about a frustrating school baking project. I think it's going to be a food retailer because we're in a kitchen and the dough is too sticky for the rolling pin. I love the kid's performance – the way she wants to give up but knows she can't because it's for s-c-h-o-o-l. Trumpets are playing *Try* and the girl is trying. She's trying as hard as she can.

She's not the only one – those nice people at **Waitrose** will try hard to help you too; in fact, one of

them looks like she knows the difference between stem ginger and crystallised ginger. We shouldn't be surprised. This is what happens when the staff own the business. It's boldly understated, but it works. Next time I have a first-world problem in the kitchen, I will get myself down to Waitrose.

From first-world problems to First World War. (And if you think that was an awkward segue, consider the chocolate bar that links **Sainsbury's** to the killing fields of northern France.)

My first impression is of quality. We've seen these battlefields on the big screen and this measures up. This is going to be a big film. Hang on. Didn't Paul McCartney do this? Ah, no, this is not going the way of a pop promo. It's altogether rather more serious. Genius choice of carol – proof of our shared linguistic heritage. But wait – is this about to come to rest on a grotesquely exploitative grocery message? Nearly. Thank goodness for The Royal British Legion. In every sense.

Please let the next one be frivolous. Bingo! Two trim and sexy fairies called Magic and Sparkle. Who doesn't like a bit of magic and sparkle at Christmas?

There's the faintest hint of sexual fantasy running through this one – and why not? There's nothing like a Yuletide bunk-up. Anyway, the duo are making people's wishes come true. A silver bra just appeared in a young man's lap. A lost cat is found. Strangers meet over a mislaid hat. It's a winter wonderland of wish fulfilment. Beautifully done, **Marks & Spencer**.

But will this last one eclipse it? I'm guessing it's **John Lewis** because there's a young boy living out some sort of solipsistic adventure with a cute animal to the sound of carefully chosen music. Is that the Serpentine? This is promising. Maybe this is the one that will make me cry big salty man-tears into my sherry. The penguin is sad. I'm actually feeling bad for the penguin. Of course – the penguin's lonely. Nobody wants to be lonely at Christmas. (Hey, *Big Issue* vendor – have my teddy bear. And here's 20 quid!) The world needs kindness.

Then – boom! The rug pull. Very faintly formulaic, but this one is no less powerful for it. My son has a toy animal that is as real in his mind as the snow on the ground. I love my son. I love Christmas.



# ad industry verdict



Sainsbury's... 'is this about to come to rest on a grotesquely exploitative grocery message? Nearly' (GH)



Tesco... 'It is its own thing and sticks to that rule' (MK)



Waitrose... 'an elegantly told story' (DC)

## Matt Keon, founder, 18 Feet & Rising



Seems like UK Christmas has become a Super Bowl moment for advertisers. So I'm going to ditch the Scrooge thing and go the mascot route. It's important to think of the context around the work. There is a belief that all ads are created in perfect conditions, that we all make the first scripts we present and that hits are the result of making the right choices. It's not true.

**John Lewis.** One thing you can't ignore is the fact that everyone now talks about the John Lewis ads. This in itself is remarkable. This execution doesn't let us down and extends the John Lewis tradition well. A good property in Monty and a warm, feel-good idea that everyone should be proud of.

**Sainsbury's.** A beautiful; cinematic film. A reflection of Christmas during the war. Edited superbly. I feel with the characters, I follow the story and I get the pay-off. Not as easy to pull off as it sounds and with everyone wanting to input on how

it should end. "Made in partnership with The Royal British Legion" weights the spot perfectly.

**Boots.** I like the notion that Christmas is an arbitrary time and that these days it's largely about bringing the family together. The idea of waiting so everyone can celebrate is a fresh one and executed emotively here. This ad also feels like the brand, which is a very important thing.

**Waitrose.** The public loves this spot. I've had it played back to me many times in conversation. Gingerbread = Waitrose. Nice story that executes the worker/owner structure. Would be interesting to hear the other music options they had, but still emotive and compelling.

**Tesco.** I think this idea has a lot going for it. I get that Tesco = closer to the community. It is its own thing and sticks to that rule. I would love to see the edit where the light display was longer but I am sure there were reasons why it didn't get past the cutting room.

**Marks & Spencer.** This is a beautifully crafted, well-handled and grown-up ad that speaks to its audience in exactly the right way. I attach M&S to magic and the feeling of quality, just as I should.

## Damon Collins, founder, Joint



Ask any big high-street retailer what they want for Christmas and they will tell you the same thing: to own it. The battle to "own" Christmas is the toughest fought and most mission-critical one of the year.

This Christmas, retailers will be spending £200 million trying to secure as large a chunk as possible of the £36 billion Britain's shoppers will be spending.

With numbers like that, advertisers will have to do something quite special to win the battle for our hearts and wallets.

So who's going to own Christmas this year?

Well, if the PR is anything to go by, it will be the same people who owned Christmas last year. And the year before. And the year before that.

In recent times, **John Lewis** has demonstrated the efficacy of advertising in all its forms. And it has built a hype machine so successful that the world now waits with bated breath

to see what emotion-filled masterpiece it will release.

This year's spot features a worryingly delusional boy so in touch with his emotions that he's prepared to spend £95 on a girlfriend for what he eventually realises is his toy penguin. What I love about this film is how quickly it became the subject of umpteen spoofs. You know you're on to a winner when YouTube is packed with videos of the star of your ad being roasted.

On the subject of ownership, **Waitrose** has festified its "when you own something, you care a little more" brand campaign.

This ad features a worryingly obsessive girl so out of touch with her emotions that she cares more about getting her gingerbread men perfect than enjoying any festivities. It's not as uplifting as the hardened Christmasophile might want, but it's an elegantly told story.

**Marks & Spencer's** seasonal offering has the requisite Christmassy magic and sparkle, all sprinkled around by its eponymous heroines. I challenge viewers not to feel just a little less Scroogey after watching it.

**Tesco** has gone all out for festive ownership this year too. Its beautifully

observed film encapsulates the anticipation of the countdown to the big day.

**Boots** tells the story of a family who get together to celebrate Christmas after one of them gets off her night shift. It's emotional, yes, but in the way a Samaritans ad might be.

Finally, we come to the **Sainsbury's** commercial. Its insight is indisputable: Christmas is for sharing. And while the rest of the category has made some lovely bits of film, Sainsbury's has made, well, an actual film.

Its re-enactment of the famous Christmas in 1914 - when the British and German soldiers agreed to stop killing each other for 48 hours - is, in effect, a doubly topical, doubly branded charity ad. It's a brave thing for a supermarket to do. Will it pay off? Who knows.

What we do know is that, come Christmas morning, while we're all unwrapping our brand new iPhones, the board members of our retailers will be on conference calls, anxiously running through the critical final few days' sales figures.

And the ones who will be smiling as they tuck into their turkey will be the ones who will have managed to "own Christmas".