

Chiropractic Commercial Hits the Mark on Nat'l Evening News

Editorial Staff

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All three major networks reported angry calls from sponsors (drug companies) demanding to know the next time the chiropractors planned to run a commercial.

On Monday evening, June 16, 1997, chiropractic took center stage in American homes with the airing of the Chiropractic Centennial Foundation's 30-second commercial on the national evening news programs of the four major television networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox). The effort, known as a "commercial roadblock," is frequently used by advertisers to "ambush" an audience by making it hard to avoid missing their commercial. The Fox stations in major markets were added to the plan to reach the audience watching non-news programming on the rapidly growing fourth network. "We wanted to make a final, dramatic gesture with limited funds," said William Holmberg, DC, CCF president, "and the roadblock fit our needs perfectly."

"Our original plan was merely to reach the widest adult audience with our message that chiropractic should be the first choice," said Guy Riekeman, DC, the producer of the commercial and the chiropractic centennial documentary. "We certainly did that, reaching over 60 million people. But it turned out that our message was also perfectly timed to counter the massive weight of medical and drug advertising that takes place every night on the network news."

"The fit was so perfect," according to Stephen Eckstone, PhD of the CCF Media Committee, "that we found ourselves right in the middle of every major controversial health issue being faced today, including the use of drugs and surgery for pain relief, the growing acceptance of alternative medicine, and the explosion of over-the-counter medications."

On the "CBS Evening News with Dan Rather," the commercial aired in the highly coveted "1A" position, the first commercial in the first break of the program following the major headlines of the day. Dan Rather went into the break announcing the upcoming report on "alternative treatments moving into the mainstream of American medicine." "The 'alternative treatments' story which followed completely ignored chiropractic," said Dr. Eckstone. "The report spokesperson was a medical doctor and all of the examples were either MDs, hypnotists, or acupressurists."

The chiropractic commercial showed a mature man seated in a living room quietly stating the facts

that 20 million Americans regularly use chiropractic as a natural, scientific approach to pain relief and a safe, cost-effective way to help maintain whole body health. "Our message was clear, precise, and demanded attention," said Eckstone. "I called CBS News the next day and asked if they had received any response to the commercial and was told the news director had reacted very strongly because the placement of the commercial made their entire alternative treatments report appear awkward and under-researched."

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Score one for chiropractic.

On the "ABC World News Tonight with Peter Jennings," the commercial again appeared in the first break of the program, and was introduced by Peter Jennings with a message to stay tuned for a report on pain. The report announced the formal support by the American Pain Society and the American Academy of Pain Medicine for the wider use of opiates in the treatment of chronic pain, specifically morphine. The story focused on the case of a young woman who was suffering excruciating back pain from an auto accident. She had already sampled 24 medications before a "pain specialist" prescribed morphine with the comforting news that only one-half of one percent of people become addicted.

"If only that one-half of one percent heard our message and decided to try chiropractic," said Dr. Holmberg, "that's over 1.5 million people, and that's just a start."

All three of the major networks, including the "NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw," reported angry calls from sponsors demanding to know the next time the chiropractors planned to run a commercial. "Whatever impact we expected," said Eckstone, "we knew we were stepping up to play in a new ball game. The drug companies spend enormous amounts of money in the network news programs because they know how important that audience is in the purchase of health care services, medications, and diet aids."

A partial list of advertisers who shared the news with the chiropractic commercial Monday evening included: AXID AR; Metamucil; Pfizer-Unisom; Advil; Ensure; One-A-Day Vitamins; Hemorid; Maalox; Nature Made Vitamins; Immodium AD; Zantac 75; Caltrate Plus; Ex-Lax; and Bayer. With such an inundation, it's hardly a wonder why consumers are so ready to take a pill or buy a pharmaceutical product for what ails them. AXID, a "heartburn" medicine, also used the roadblock technique during the evening news to run their commercial on the three major networks.

"We scored a direct hit with the commercial," said Dr. Holmberg. "I just wish we could do it every night to help counter the massive amount of money and power the medical profession and the drug companies wield in the media. Then, when the Chiropractic Bicentennial Committee meets in 2095, they can look back at how successful we were in helping to make chiropractic the first choice."

Editor's note: If you would like to obtain a copy of the chiropractic roadblock commercial, contact the Chiropractic Centennial Foundation at (319) 326-9652.

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