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It's a Trump world for advertisers, big brands now with immigration Super Bowl ads

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Bob Case knows there is some peril in big companies, advertisers and brands taking political positions — including in Sunday night's Super Bowl.

84 Lumber Co. — which has a store in Chandler, opened a regional office in Phoenix last year and wants to open a dozen new stores in the West — was the boldest with a [Super Bowl ad](#) about the journey of a presumed undocumented immigrant mother and daughter making their way from Mexico to the U.S. One version of the ad turned down by Fox featured a border wall proposed by President [Donald Trump](#).



84 LUMBER

Part of 84 Lumber's Super Bowl LI ad

But Case, chief creative officer for Phoenix-based advertising firm Lavidge, says the landscape and expectations from consumers and employees has changed.

"Audiences today, especially younger ones, want to know that the brands they use aren't faceless bureaucracies, they want to connect with brands that share values," Case said. "Gone are the days of [Michael Jordan](#) famously refusing to comment on anything political because 'Republicans buy Nikes too.'"

Coca-Cola Co. (NYSE: KO) ran a Super Bowl ad touting religious and other diversity. [Anheuser Busch Inbev NV](#) (NYSE: ADR) ran a Budweiser ad touting America's immigrant history.

"Coke's message of acceptance was smart for a brand that has a worldwide audience to consider, and Budweiser spoke to their immigrant roots — not terribly unique in a nation of immigrants, but timing made them far more controversial," Case said.

Coca-Cola has also come out against Trump's controversial immigration and travel ban he is trying to impose on seven Muslim-majority countries.

Starbucks (Nasdaq: SBUX), Apple Inc. (Nasdaq: AAPL) and Amazon.com Inc. (Nasdaq: AMZN) have also publicly opposed Trump's travel and refugee ban.

A Coke spokesperson said the ad was meant to be optimistic and inclusive.

Here's their full statement:

The premise of 'It's Beautiful' can be simply stated: America is beautiful and Coca-Cola is for everyone. "It's Beautiful" celebrates Coca-Cola moments among all Americans and features snapshots of American families. We believe it's a powerful ad that promotes optimism, inclusion and celebrates humanity – values that are core to Coca-Cola. The ad shows just a few of the ways Americans enjoy our brand and how Coca-Cola brings families and friends together every day.

Trump's bare-knuckle politics and willingness to take on everyone from the media and federal judges to big companies such as Lockheed Martin (NYSE: LMT) and Ford Motor Co. (NYSE: F) as well as activist groups opposing him puts pressure on big brands and advertisers to take stances.

"This is forcing brands to go places they haven't had to in the past; they have to tell us who they are and what they believe," said Case.

That showed up in companies' reactions to Trump's travel order and in last night's Super Bowl ad lineup.

"Last week we saw Apple, Google and Starbucks all come out with statements on immigration they never would have made in the past, but to maintain the trust of their own employees they had to come forth and take a position," Case said.

A spokesperson for Pittsburgh-based 84 Lumber said the ad is about work ethic.

"We're a building materials company so we're not qualified to discuss the details on immigration policies. All we can say is 84 Lumber is a place where your work ethic and ambition matter more than what you look like on the outside," the spokesperson said.

84 Lumber President Maggie Hardy Magerko defended the ad in a statement before the Super Bowl between the New England Patriots and Atlanta Falcons.

"Even President Trump has said there should be a 'big beautiful door in the wall so that people can come into this country legally,'" said Hardy Magerko. "It's not about the wall. It's about the door in the wall. If people are willing to work hard and make this country better, that door should be open to them."

Hillary Clinton carried big business (and consumer) markets such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and San Francisco by wide margins over Trump. That puts them in hometown echo chambers for thoughts about the new administration.

Phoenix was the largest U.S. metro area to go for Trump in November.

The more political ads were successful in grabbing attention for those brands.

"The most successful Super Bowl commercials cut through the clutter and get noticed, and all three spots are certainly creating conversation. Given the political landscape, these companies obviously knew that their spots would be controversial and get attention. Time will tell whether it will help or hurt their brands, said Ian Barry, chief creative officer with Phoenix-based ad firm LaneTerralover.

Case said ads and stances by companies show socially active consumers where they stand. He's not sure whether those efforts — including the 84 Lumber spot — will have an impact in a country where Hillary Clinton got 48 percent of the popular vote and Trump 46 percent and there are deep divides based on race, age, religious affiliations and gender.

"By humanizing the plight of people in that situation they hoped, I'm assuming, to sway opinions," Case said referring to the 84 Lumber ad. "But with the country so deeply divided on that issue, the debate would be whether anyone actually changed their opinion."

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