

# Through the Wire

by Mike Reynolds, John Eggerton, Todd Spangler and Kent Gibbons

## DirecTV's Latest Ad, Riding Its NFL Rivals, Draws Penalty Flag

**DIRECTV'S LATEST SERIES** of TV ads for its out-of-market National Football League football package, "NFL Sunday Ticket," has centered, rather amusingly, on displaced fans being able to watch their team in their rivals' home markets and on multiple devices.

To wit, creative in the current campaign, carrying an estimated media budget of some \$100 million, has played off of the feuds between the New England Patriots and Miami Dolphins; New York Giants and Dallas Cowboys; and those same 'Boys and the Washington Redskins, among others.

The latest entry, at least to the eyes and ears of a couple of contributors to *The Wire*, harkens to the ongoing contretemps between the top satellite-TV provider and cable.

In "Cake," a husband and wife sit

forlornly in an empty home, the misus intoning "Sunday football's a tradition in our house" as she holds a cake shaped like a football field, flanked by a table full of untouched food. "So we got RedZone from the cable company and we found out it's just plays inside the 20."

The husband, sporting a Peyton Manning jersey and perched on the stairs holding a snack bowl, laments: "It's not whole games; it's highlights."

The wife continues: "Of course, Nancy got DirecTV and now, well..." The spot cuts to a neighbor's house, where folks are partying, led by a fist-pumping middle-ager in a Manning uniform. Convincing herself "It's OK, it's OK," the wife snaps off and bites one of the goal posts, before stuffing her face with a handful of football cake.

From there, cut to an image

of Jacksonville Jaguars running back Maurice Jones-Drew plunging into the end zone versus the Buffalo Bills, with a voiceover from Cris Collinsworth, concluding in part: "Only DirecTV has every minute of every game..."

For *The Wire*, this spot should be penalized, or applauded, for a couple of reasons. Once again, it underscores the rivalry between DirecTV and cable, which has never been able to tackle Sunday Ticket. From this perch, the hardly collegial "Cake" takes a shot at cable, telco video providers and the league itself, the takeaway being that the Ticket's alternative, NFL Network's NFL RedZone scoring and highlights channel, is inferior and unsatisfying. (It should be pointed out that the RedZone feature in Sunday Ticket preceded the kickoff of the NFL's entry last season.)



A *Wire* personal foul on NBC announcer Cris Collinsworth for taking part in an ad bashing NFL RedZone.

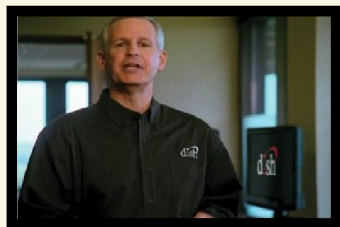
REUTERS/PHIL MACARTEN

That Collinsworth — the analyst for NBC's *Sunday Night Football*, which, unlike CBS and Fox, doesn't compete with Sunday Ticket for fans' attention and dollars on Sunday afternoon (not to mention an NFL Network alumnus) — provides the voice for this and the rest of the

current batch of DirecTV spots constitutes the foul of piling on.

At least that's *The Wire's* opinion. There's no telling what NFL Network, DirecTV and NBC think as they declined to comment or failed to respond to those curious about "Cake."

### Dish's Charlie Ergen: He's Just a Guy Who Wants to Watch TV



Dish's new pitchman: Boss Charlie Ergen.

Dish Network's new ads feature CEO Charlie Ergen as a spokesman, clad in a black button-down shirt with the DBS operator's logo, to make him look like a working-class Joe.

The ads — aimed at reversing recent Dish subscriber losses — have the tagline "Let's Watch TV" and a cute little jingle with a Jack Johnson-style guitar and handclaps.

In the latest ad, he asks the viewer: "Have you ever wondered why you have to pay for channels you don't watch? Like paying for children's channels, and you don't have any kids. Or shopping channels — and you're a guy!"

*Quelle horreur.*

A couple of problems with that, though: Dish doesn't actually offer packages that exclude kids' programming or shopping channels. Furthermore, QVC, HSN and ShopNBC don't even charge carriage fees — in fact, they typically give a cut of their sales to the distributors — so it's not like eliminating them would lower your overall monthly bill.

According to Dish, the examples Ergen provides in the ad are merely to illustrate the issue of choice as part of the satellite operator's claim that it offers more options on packages than competitors. Ergen does note in the spot that "no one in the business is allowed to give you each channel individually."

Meanwhile, Ergen's claim that Dish is "ranked No. 1 among cable and satellite companies for customer satisfaction" — based on the 2010 American Customer Satisfaction Index survey — conveniently leaves out AT&T and Verizon Communications, both of which scored higher.

The new ad began airing Aug. 23, and follows spots with Ergen chatting about Dish's customer service and how he started the company. ("That's me 30 years ago delivering my first satellite dish. That's kind of an embarrassing picture!")

### GAC Helps DirecTV Keep Beat Going At Summer Fests

Ad campaigns aside, one way DirecTV pursues subscriber leads is sponsored events with programmers, including Scripps-owned Great American Country.

The satellite-TV leader sponsored GAC's Fairs and Festivals Tour this past summer, obtaining customer leads at a half-dozen events visited by the GAC bus. The most recent was Labor Day weekend at the Silver Dollar City theme park in Branson, Mo.

"Our reason for doing it is to reach out to our fans and be at the places where they are and would expect us to be," GAC marketing vice president Scott Durand (who attended all the events) told *The Wire* ahead of his visit to Branson.

A big draw is the giveaway of a guitar signed by all of the artists at any given event, Durand said. GAC also puts on a beanbag toss to win koozies and T-shirts during the down time between acts.

At the CMA Music Festival, one dealer said he came away with 2,000 potential subscriber leads after four days, according to Durand. ■



GAC's "Country Thunder" bus drew fans — and would-be subscribers — in Twin Cities, Wisc.