

ESPN COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

Problem

How do you inform college football fans of the new College Football Playoff format?

Solution

Use digital OOH to drive tune-in for each Semifinal game and utilize dynamic content to showcase live-scores.

Background

The 2014-2015 season was a pivotal year in College Football history, as it was the first year in which the postseason consisted of a 4-team playoff structure. This was a major departure from the previous BCS system, in which the top 2 teams in the BCS rankings were selected for the National Championship game.

Starting in 2014 in the new College Football Playoff system, a selection committee would evaluate a variety of factors (such as record, strength of schedule, etc.) to determine the top 4 selected teams. Semifinals would take place on New Year's Day or New Year's Eve, as a rotation among 6 high-profile bowl games. The winners of these Semifinal bowl games would move on to the National Championship Game.

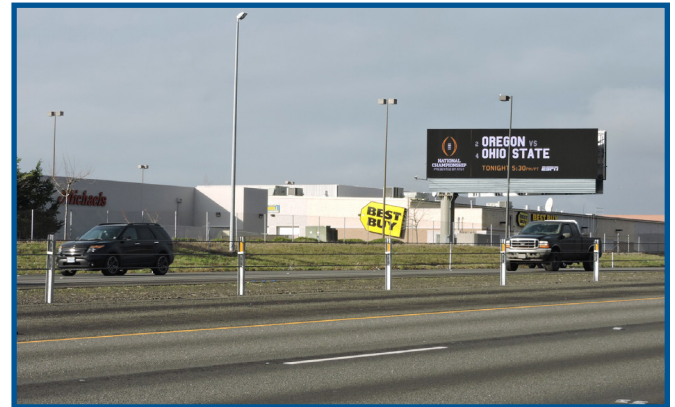
ESPN won TV broadcast rights for all games of the College Football Playoff starting in 2014. Because this College Football Playoff structure was a major departure from the BCS structure, ESPN was tasked with the challenge of building awareness among college football fans of the new playoff format, as well as ultimately driving on-air ratings for the 2 Semifinal games and the National Championship Game.

Objective

The objective of the campaign was to build awareness among college football fans of the new College Football Playoff format and drive on-air ratings for the two Semifinal bowl games and the National Championship Game. The primary demographic target was males 18-34.

Strategy

Primary strategy for OOH was to navigate college football fans to each game window for the Semifinals and National Championship. Based on the short time windows and multiple game match-ups to promote, digital bulletins were selected for flexibility in media timing and creative messaging.



Working in conjunction with the general media planning agency, ESPN established target GRP goals by flight day, which were weighted to gradually increase each day as the flight got closer to the Semifinal bowl games. Media weight goals increased daily from 2 GRPs per market on 12/28 and 12/29, up to 3 GRPs per market on 12/30, and up to 7-8 GRPs per market on 12/31 and 1/1. On 12/31 and 1/1, 2 digital spots per rotation were executed to increase media weight and provide additional creative impact.

Specific digital bulletin locations were selected to maximize geographic coverage, meet or exceed the market GRP goals, and provide the most efficient CPMs.

Utilizing the flexibility of digital OOH, multiple creative executions were posted to drive tune-in for each Semifinal game (Rose Bowl and Sugar Bowl), and utilize dynamic content to showcase live-score creative during each game.

To heavy-up support for the National Championship Game on Monday 1/12/15, a large-scale multi-market DOOH flight was executed for one-day only on 1/12. All available digital bulletin inventory was purchased within 30 of the top 36 DMAs.

Creative drove tune-in for the National Championship Game that night, and showcased dynamic live-score content during the game.

Plan Details

OOH media was planned in two separate flights, one flight supporting the Semifinal games, and one flight supporting the National Championship Game.

Semifinals:

Semifinals support was flighted 12/28/14 through 1/1/15 (day of Semifinals match-ups). Digital bulletins were utilized in 5 markets for Semifinals support (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas).

National Championship:

National Championship Game support was flighted for Monday 1/12/15 only in 30 DMAs.

Results

TV ratings for the two College Football Playoff Semifinal games were the highest rated telecasts in cable history. The Rose Bowl received a 14.8 metered market average rating, which was a 45% increase from the previous year. The Sugar Bowl received an even higher rating, at a 15.2 metered market average rating, which was a 130% increase from the previous year.

TV ratings for the National Championship Game broadcast shattered the cable records set by the Semifinals just 12 days prior. The National Championship Game received an 18.91 metered market average, which represented an increase over previous BCS Championship Games of 21% compared to 2014, 18% compared to 2013, and 34% compared to 2012.

