



**2007 Gold Effie Winner**

## **Comcast “The Slowskys”**

Category: **Internet Products & Services**

Agency: **Goodby, Silverstein & Partners**

Client: **Comcast**

### **Strategic Challenge**

#### **Fighting a “clean election.”**

By the beginning of 2006, most Americans had come to rely on a home internet connection. In fact, a home internet connection had become a utility – and like most utilities it had become commoditized.

As people started using the internet in more sophisticated ways to do more things, they were looking for the next version of an ISP – a “high-speed” internet connection.

The two ISP candidates for a better internet connection were cable companies, like Comcast, and the RBOCs like AT&T and Verizon (who call their product DSL). Although Comcast’s internet connection was significantly faster than DSL, most people erroneously believed that the two products were the same and that all high speed connections were created equal. [Source: Client and Agency qualitative research, 2005.]

The RBOCs were more than happy to perpetuate this perception. They were pricing their lead products at sensationally low prices (AT&T’s lead internet connection was a mere \$14.99/month at the beginning of 2006, it dropped even further to \$12.99/month by the middle of the year). Worse, the RBOCs were flooding the marketplace with messages that implied absolute parity between the Cable and RBOC products (dialogue from one DSL TV spot has one man saying “I hear cable is fast.” His friend responds by saying “so is DSL.”).

While Comcast offered a genuinely faster connection it was doing it at a premium (with 3-month

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promotional prices that were higher than DSL and a \$42.95/month “standard” price). Our job was to de-commoditize high-speed internet by establishing a valuable difference between our product and DSL. We needed to give people a reason to want to pay nearly three times as much for our product. Adding to this challenge was the fact that the fight for internet subscribers had become the equivalent of a dirty election. RBOCs had been running ads explicitly trashing Comcast’s ISP product.

We needed to “strike back”. However, as the big, bad, cable company, people were looking for reasons dislike Comcast. We couldn’t resort to mud-slinging. Before we could communicate our message, we had to approach people in a way that was likeable and inviting.

### **Messaging Objectives**

- 1) Acquire new high-speed internet subscribers – despite the price disadvantage.
- 2) Keep current customers from leaving us for a significantly cheaper competitive service.
- 3) Create breakthrough “uncommoditized” messaging that disarmed and engaged people.

## **The Big Idea**

### **“Upgrade Right.”**

We needed to get potential ISP upgraders out of the commodity-price mode and remind them that the reason they wanted to upgrade in the first place was speed. As we had learned from analyzing previous messaging from Comcast, just saying, “We’re faster,” wasn’t compelling enough to convince people to stop focusing on price. We had to make the effects of picking a high-speed connection — or getting stuck with a slow one — feel more immediate and tangible. We arrived at the strategy “Upgrade right” to heighten the urgency and the importance of making the right ISP decision and to allow for the idea of speed to play a more important role in people’s decision making process. While we needed a sense of immediacy, we also knew that we had to disarm the audience if we wanted them to be open to hearing Comcast implicitly criticize the competition. We understood early that the **tonal guidelines** for the idea were as important as the **strategic message**. In order to have our message heard, we needed to be:

*Fun and good-natured* — Our messaging should feel entertaining, light-hearted, in a can’t-help-butlike-’em sort of way, to keep people “in on the fun” with us.

*Educational* — We should appear to be educating people about the differences between technologies, not denigrating particular brands or products.

*Humble* — If we were going to attack the competition, we couldn’t be seen as tooting our own horn too loudly.

## **Bringing the Idea to Life**

### **Meet the Slowskys.**

Bill and Karolyn Slowsky are a married couple, happily living in suburbia. They playfully tease each other and finish each other’s jokes. We see scenes from their life on TV commercials — Bill and Karolyn reading the paper in bed, Bill drinking (decaf) coffee in the morning, Karolyn lounging by the pool in the afternoon. On Karolyn’s blog, we hear about the books she’s reading. They seem to have the same quirks as your parents.

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They also embody the effects and mindset of upgrading wrong. In fact, they rejoice in their decision to pick the slowest possible DSL connection. Which makes sense, because they're turtles. Early consumer feedback underlined that while messaging with the Slowskys was obviously from Comcast (a brand that consumers don't always warm to), their endearing and familiar manner made the brand and its message friendly and inviting. Because the Slowskys celebrated the competition's DSL product (rather than Comcast's) they are able to deliver a lot of hard-hitting product information (i.e. "DSL is up to seven times slower than Comcast") without the negativity and maliciousness that had come to define ISP messaging.

The Slowskys effort was led by TV and their presence expanded across other traditional media, from print to DM. More particularly, online was critical. TV was where the "election debate" was being handled but online was where connection comes to life. Building off the TV campaign, a video of Slowsky outtakes, featuring their thoughts on topics ranging from dating to self-awareness, was spread online virally. Banner ads linked back to **theslowskys.com**, a site made by Bill and Karolyn featuring Karolyn's blog, which was regularly updated and commented upon. You could even add Bill to your IM buddy list and chat with him, although sometimes he took awhile to type out his messages.

Buzz around the Slowskys and the site has been huge. More importantly, it has been brand building, with 53% of mentions of the Slowskys online also including mention of "Comcast." [Source: Nielsen BuzzMetrics, Post-Campaign Analysis, June 2006.]

## Results

- 1) Acquire new high-speed internet subscribers** despite the premium. The two quarters during which the Slowskys campaign has been running have seen unprecedented growth for Comcast's high-speed internet business.
  - During Q2 and Q3 of 2006, **Comcast added 841,000 new subscribers — a 20% increase** in subscribers (resulting in a 22% increase in revenue).
  - Q3 2006 had **the highest quarterly additions of ISP subscribers in two years.**
  - Comcast **penetration has increased by 16%** since the beginning of the year.
  - While the advertising mainly targeted dial-up users, it was surprising effective at convincing DSL users of their product inferiority. **Nearly a third of new subs switched from DSL providers.**

[Source: Comcast Quarterly Earnings Reports, Q2 2006 and Q3 2006.]

- 2) Keep current customers from leaving us for a significantly cheaper competitive service**
  - Despite fears of accelerated churn rates out of Comcast, **churn rates actually remained constant during the DSL price war** (Q2/Q3 2006 vs. Q2/Q3 2005; actual figures could not be disclosed).
  - The customers Comcast retained were more valuable than the ones won by DSL. While Comcast average revenue per user (ARPU) has held steady around \$44/month (\$43.81 for Q2), ARPU for DSL has declined to \$33.31/month in Q2 2006 (from \$35.14/month at the end of 2005).

[Source: Comcast internal data; Bear Stearns report on Cable and Satellite TV 2006]

- 3) Create breakthrough messaging that disarmed and engaged people.** In line with the

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intention to charm and disarm, the Slowskys broke free of the problems of the "dirty election" on TV.

- The TV ads exceeded Comcast's five-year likeability and appeal advertising norms, **69%** vs. 42%.
- **68%** of tracking study respondents felt that the ads were "much better" than other category ads (vs. a mediocre category norm of 39%).
- Comcast brand attribute "entertaining" increased from a five-year **40% norm to 65%**, and "likable" from **44% to 60%**.

And message communication was also high: 86% of respondents got the message that "Comcast High-Speed Internet is faster than DSL." [Source: Harris copytest, February 2006.]

Beyond intended effects, the Slowskys have also had a broader reach than we anticipated. The Slowskys have become part of the culture. In addition to accolades in the blogosphere for the Slowskys (ranging from statements like, "I want to live next door to the Slowskys," to people posting pictures of their pet turtles as Slowsky cousins), people online adopted the word "Slowsky" to refer to things that move at a glacial pace (from Verizon's customer service — "Update, I still haven't gotten the f-in phone. I think Verizon's got a case of the Slowskys" — to pickle sales — "Pickle sales are what one might label as slow, and by slow I mean Slowsky slow"). [Source: web postings via Nielsen BuzzMetrics and Agency web search.]

Comcast was so enamored with the Slowskys that Chairman and CEO Brian Roberts had the Agency produce a video of the Slowskys introducing him for his monthly address to the entire company (the other celebrity was non-turtle Ryan Seacrest). He also had Slowsky keychains made and given to every Comcast employee.

As importantly, the Slowskys (as part of the whole debate about internet connection) may also have had some part in changing the commodity conversation around ISPs from price to speed. In their October 23, 2006 Report on Cable and Satellite TV, Bear Stearns states that "Broadband is Actually Becoming Less Commoditized." According to their Communications Survey, in 2005 price was the most important aspect of ISP for consumers. In 2006 this had changed. Price had fallen to third place with reliability and speed taking the lead in consumers' minds. Given enough time the Slowskys may reach the same conclusion.

## Other Marketplace Factors

Comcast's messaging architecture is tiered to help people through the purchase funnel. In addition to the Slowskys "strike back" messaging, the agency also created two other tiers of messaging that incorporated the high-speed internet product: "Acquisition" work which, much like retail advertising, gave people product information, a price, and a call to action ("call 1 800 COMCAST"); product-brand level work (launched XXXX) that manifested the brand's personality and speed benefit.

While the Slowskys has large adoption in by both national and field marketers, regional Comcast offices may have produced and put additional messaging into their local markets that was not tracked by Comcast.

**Budget:** \$20 million and over

**Campaign Reach:** National

**Media Channels:** TV, Radio, Interactive/Online

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