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Where Have the Car Commercials Gone?

Automakers are leaning more heavily on streaming and regional television

By Patrick Coffee

The car and truck commercials that once packed ad breaks are thinning out on traditional TV, particularly its cable networks, as automakers respond to intense budget pressure and consumers' evolving media habits.

Targeted streaming buys and regional, sales-driven executions have usurped the high-level national prime time branding spots that once dominated linear TV.

Consider National Football League games, long a showcase for automotive brand campaigns. National matchups on traditional TV featured 107 car and truck commercials across 15 games during this season's first week. That is down from 158 commercials across 16 games three years ago, before a matchup in the sample migrated to streaming, according to the measurement firm iSpot.

The most recent Super Bowl included only four national car ads, compared with a regular rotation of 10 or more a decade ago.

Automotive advertising will drop below 10% of annual U.S. ad spending for the first time this year, despite the presence of marquee forums like the World Cup and the Winter Olympics, according to ad intelligence firm Guideline, which tracks spending via ad agency invoices. Ten years ago, it accounted for 13%.

The numbers reflect the weakened state of auto advertisers compared with sectors like pharmaceuticals and gambling, said Sean Wright, the firm's chief insights and analytics officer.

"Advertising continues to grow, and plenty of brands and categories have happily filled the space left by carmakers," Wright said.

Automotive advertising will fall below 10% of U.S. ad spending this year.

Car brands' budgets face greater scrutiny than ever before because of a unique combination of financial pressures stemming from tariffs, interest rates and the rising cost of gasoline, said Gina Reduto, executive vice president of strategy, advertising and partnerships at NBCUniversal. "Auto is not immune to everything that we're seeing in the marketplace," Reduto said. "Marketers are being tasked with demonstrating the value of every dollar that they spend."

At the same time, car and truck makers have to maintain enough brand investment to ensure their sales pitches work in the end.

The industry, like others, is partly following consumers. Its streaming spending surpassed traditional TV for the first time in the second quarter of 2025, according to iSpot, and has remained on top for most quarters since.

Honda isn't "purposely trying to shift everything to connected TV," said Megan Amic, head of digital marketing and strategy for American Honda Motor Co. in North America. "It's just following where we know the eyeballs are."

Live sports are a big part of that, Amic said. When NBCUniversal added Premier League soccer games to its streaming platform Peacock, for example, Honda's ads followed, she said.

But big brands including Honda and **Volkswagen** have pivoted forcefully away from so-called Tier 1 campaigns, national efforts designed to raise awareness of a brand or a new model, in favor of Tier 2 ads promoting sales events, which are often created in partnership with regional dealership associations and targeted to specific regions.

The share of automakers' linear TV U.S. ad dollars that went to Tier 2 campaigns has grown to nearly 40% this year through August from 20% in the same period of 2023, iSpot found.

Tier 2 marketing dovetails with the capabilities of streaming TV, according to automakers and observers.

Targeting is now the No. 1 factor determining where car brands spend their money, Amic said. Connected TV, unlike linear, can reach very specific localities or consumer groups while allowing marketers to dial their spending up or down based on performance, she said.

Patrick Coffee writes for WSJ Leadership Institute's CMO Today.

Jay-Z Announced as Super Bowl Halftime Performer

By Elias Leight

The National Football League announced that Jay-Z will perform at the next Super Bowl halftime show—an about-face for a star who once bragged about turning down the very same gig on the song "Apes—."

"I said no to the Super Bowl / You need me, I don't need you," he rapped in 2018. "Every night we in the end zone, tell the NFL we in stadiums too."

While picking Jay-Z seems surprising given this dismissive couplet, his company Roc Nation has been helping the league with live music strategy since 2019—he effectively booked himself.

The NFL revealed his selection during a Monday Night Football game between the Dallas Cowboys and the Philadelphia Eagles. "This run continues to be a dream come true," the rapper said in a statement.

The halftime show, now sponsored by Apple Music, was once dominated by classic rockers (Tom Petty, the Rolling Stones, Bruce Springsteen) and pop stars (Katy Perry, Bruno Mars, Lady Gaga). But since Roc Nation got involved, the event has made room for Latin music—Shakira with Jennifer Lopez, Bad Bunny—and especially hip-hop. Dr. Dre helmed halftime in 2022, Kendrick Lamar in 2025, and now Jay-Z will handle 2027.

In 2024, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said the league would extend its Roc Nation partnership. "It's been a mutually positive relationship," he said. "Jay is happy...I'm happy, so we're all good."

On Monday, Goodell described Jay-Z's impact on the Super Bowl halftime show as "extraordinary." "When we first reached an agreement with Roc Nation to produce the show, I had just one request," Goodell added. "That Jay-Z take the stage himself one day, whenever the moment felt right to him."



KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES

Jay-Z's company, Roc Nation, has been helping the NFL with its music strategy since 2019.

Some conservatives have been displeased with recent halftime show performers. A segment claimed they couldn't understand Lamar's rapping. In Bad Bunny's case, they complained that he sings in Spanish and has denounced Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Still, these mini-concerts, which last roughly 13 minutes, have been watched en masse. Lamar's set a record in 2025 with an average of more than 133 million viewers across television and digital platforms, according to Nielsen.

Unlike those artists, Jay-Z hasn't been musically active recently. While he has sold more than 71 million albums in the U.S. to date, according to the Recording Industry Association of America, he hasn't put out a new solo project since "4:44" in 2017. "Apes—" appeared the following year on "Everything Is Love," a nine-song collaboration with his wife, Beyoncé.

Even though Jay-Z hasn't released new albums, he has been on a nostalgic victory lap this year. He released an eight-part docuseries on HBO with producer Rick Rubin and played a series of shows, including three at Yankee Stadium in July, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of his debut album, "Reasonable Doubt," along with the 25th anniversary of "The Blueprint."

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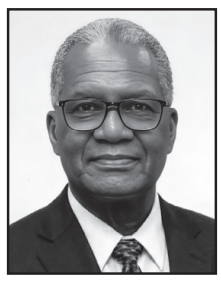
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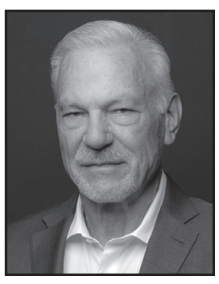
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