

NACHO AVERAGE COMMERCIAL

Filmmakers score big with Super Bowl ad for Doritos



TWO FORMER MINNEAPOLIS COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE film students made Super Bowl history in January when their 30-second commercial featuring a nunchuk-swinging, nacho-cheese-chip-clad warrior became the most-watched television commercial. Ever.

"That's everybody's dream, to get a commercial in the Super Bowl," Cole Koehler said. "It definitely was an experience we'll never forget."

The spot, which aired just after the New Orleans Saints returned an interception for a game-clinching touchdown, was seen by 116.2 million people, as measured by the Nielsen Co. That's more people than watched the season finale of "M*A*S*H" in 1983 (108.9 million viewers) or saw the Beatles play "The Ed Sullivan Show" in 1964 (73 million).

Koehler, 33, and Ben Krueger, 32, met in 2003 when both were beginning students in the college's two-year filmmaking program. Both already had earned bachelor's degrees, Koehler at the University of Nebraska and Krueger at Gustavus Adolphus College, when they entered the filmmaking program to pursue interests in movie directing and screenwriting. They quickly became friends and started working on projects together.

Last fall, they were among 4,000 teams that submitted a commercial in a contest sponsored by Frito-Lay, makers of Doritos tortilla chips.

It took the pair about two weeks to create the concept, write the script, make the warrior costume and get ready to shoot the commercial, titled "Snack Attack Samurai."

A friend helped design the samurai costume, made of foam sheets painted the color of Doritos and cut into triangles.

"We spent two days making several thousand chips, and then we hot-glued them onto a cardboard base," Krueger said. A lampshade was used as the base for the helmet.

The commercial itself took just four hours to shoot and cost well under \$1,000 – probably about \$600, Krueger guesses, and far less than the estimated \$350,000 average cost to produce a 30-second television commercial today.

In late December, they learned that their commercial was one of six finalists. The top three commercials, measured by the number of votes on the company's Web site, would be shown during the Super Bowl, and the makers would have a chance to win up to \$1 million.

The two spent January organizing a grassroots campaign to get people to vote online for their commercial. They passed out fliers at Minnesota Wild hockey and Timberwolves basketball games and contacted local news organizations. Koehler's mother drove across the country in an RV sporting a banner soliciting votes. They sent messages daily to everyone in their e-mail lists for a month.

A few days before the big game, Koehler and Krueger were flown to Miami and, like the other finalists, were treated like celebrities, receiving lavish gift bags and free dinners.

The Super Bowl game itself "was such an emotional roller-coaster," Koehler said. When the game started, none of the finalists knew whether their



Left, a samurai warrior in a Doritos costume was the star of the Super Bowl commercial made by Cole Koehler and Ben Krueger, former film students at Minneapolis Community and Technical College. The spot turned out to be the most-watched commercial in history.

Below, scenes from making the commercial, which was shot in a Minneapolis boxing gym. Koehler also acted in the spot; he's the man wearing a headband. Krueger is wearing a baseball cap.

“It sounds crazy, but if you want to do something, just get out there and do it.”



Photos courtesy of On Set Photography

commercial would be one of the three shown. As they watched from a stadium luxury suite, the contestants had to return to their designated seats for every commercial break so that their reactions could be filmed for a video. For Krueger, the wait was excruciating.

“I kept thinking to myself, they’re filming you; don’t throw up on camera,” Krueger recalled.

As Krueger and Koehler watched the first quarter, they saw one competitor’s work appear, then another’s and finally a third. But not “Snack Attack Samurai.” The two were heartbroken.

“I really had a sense of doubt,” Koehler said. “I was thinking, why are we here?” But then a company spokesperson walked in and announced a surprise – they had bought a fourth spot for one more commercial.

Finally, with a little more than three minutes left in the game, the “Snack Attack” ad came on.

“Our hearts were jumping out of our chests,” Koehler said. “We felt vindicated for all our hard work.”

Since then, life has changed for the filmmakers. People who hadn’t returned their phone calls suddenly were calling them for meetings. Both hope to use their momentary fame as a stepping stone to their dream of writing and directing feature-length films as a team.

Though they didn’t win the million dollars, the two received \$25,000 for being finalists. They plan to use the money to pay the volunteers, many of

them filmmaking professionals, who helped them make the commercial.

Relationships are important to working in the industry, the two told a class of filmmaking students at the college in March. “Keep a good relationship with everybody you’ve met or worked with, even if you don’t like them,” Koehler advised the students.

“Especially if you don’t like them,” Krueger added, “because they probably can do some awesome things.”

Since finishing their film studies, both have found work in the film industry. Together they’ve done two public service announcements for the city of Minneapolis. Koehler has worked on a movie in Iowa and on commercials and short films in Los Angeles; he moved back to Minnesota in 2009 to work as a film loader on the Coen brothers’ movie, “A Serious Man,” which was filmed in the state. He’s now working on a director’s reel that will serve as his filmmaking résumé. Krueger worked on a documentary on pre-Columbian history for The History Channel.

They told the Minneapolis students to do what they did – grab whatever jobs you can find in the film industry, meet as many people as you can, make films, enter contests and do whatever it takes to get your work out there.

“If you want to work in this industry, here’s what you’ve got to do,” Krueger said. “It sounds crazy, but if you want to do something, just get out there and do it.” ■