

Vinny Warren

WASSUP!



artillerybrand.com

Sales of Budweiser had been in decline for almost a decade by 1999. The good news was Bud's sibling, Bud Light, was killing it. Double digit sales increases year on year.

I worked on the Budweiser and Bud Light brands for a total of nine years. At the time Bud had the most loved advertising in America. It featured animated frogs and talking lizards.

I personally wasn't a fan of this advertising. It felt puerile to me. If I'm an 18 year old drinker, I want to drink the cool beer. I want to be an adult. (Beer advertising rant over!)

So when a producer pal, Carol King, showed me a tape of a short film that featured African-American guys shouting Wassup! at each other over the phone, I immediately imagined them drinking Budweiser.

The situation perfectly mirrored our target audience. Drinking beer, watching football and talking shit on the phone with your pals.

I also found the short film hilarious. And I couldn't figure out why. I laughed every time. It was just irresistible.

I got a copy of this VHS tape and I played it for my colleagues. They all loved it too. And the next time we would meet, we would shout Wassup! at each other and laugh for reasons only we knew.

This got me excited.



Bud Light had a few catchphrase hits in the '90s. None of which were mine. But I had plenty of time to figure out why they worked.

They worked because they were useful prefab social comedy. One of them gave you permission to tell your pals "I love you man!" after a few beers. It swept the land like the plague.

This was the context in which I presented my idea of adapting the short film for Budweiser to my boss, Don Pogany at DDB Chicago. He liked it. He sold it.

One minor detail was that Charles Stone III, the director of the short film, had no idea any of this happened.

This was back in 1999. Not everything was online back then.

So I had to track Charles down and convince him that we weren't doing some cheesy Pepsi ad here. We wanted the same original undiluted magic. Again.

Charles agreed to do it. And I made a conscious decision not to mess with his directorial choices. The only line I added was the response "Watching the game, havin' a Bud".

Charles' short film was shot for no money basically. Now we had a sizable budget to do it in a Hollywood manner.

We came up with more spots that played off the catchphrase.

We shot the spots in NYC in December 1999.



Bear in mind though that our idea was just one of many ideas in production at the same time in anticipation of Super Bowl 2000.

So it wasn't like there was huge pressure on us. Far from it in fact. We had creative freedom.

Wassup! was an editorial joke. It built to a crescendo that overwhelmed the viewer.

So watching guys endlessly scream Wassup! into phones was not an exciting shoot.

But the edit was amazing.

We had unwittingly (and somewhat bizarrely) chosen the same L.A. editor who supplied the VHS tape of the short film to my producer pal.

He was an OG fan of the short film. His name was Livio Sanchez.

We let Livio and Charles edit unsupervised. I felt I owed Charles final cut approval here. Out of respect.

Also, I had another Super Bowl spot to shoot at the same time. So I busied myself with that.

The virality of the Wassup! idea first became apparent in post production.



All the post house interns wanted to watch the spots over and over again. Everybody loved them apparently.

But because everyone seemingly loved the ads I became a bit paranoid. Were they just kissing my ass? Was this real? I needed an objective opinion.

So I got a VHS of the rough cuts and went back to my hotel. I ordered some Budweisers from room service. An African-American waiter came to my room bearing some ice cold Buds.

I then uttered words that sounded as awkward and uncomfortable then as they do now.

“Would you mind if I showed you some videos?”

He didn't run away. He watched. He laughed hard. And then he said, “You know what you got there? You got a phenomenon!!!” He was right. I gave him a big tip.

We showed the spots to Anheuser-Busch on December 21. They loved them too.

“Never mind the Super Bowl, air it in the NBA game on Christmas Day” was their direction.

Wassup! was designed to go viral in the traditional sense. But it also went viral in the then-new internet way.

And because it was so simply shot, anyone could shoot a parody of it on a video camera. And they did.



A tsunami of parodies suddenly appeared online. The parodies got serious traction too. Our fans had taken over. Doing it for free.

Creating a global pop culture sensation was mind affecting. My wildest dreams were exceeded. And then some.

I have a lot of great memories from that time.

But this one stands out.

We were back in New York filming sequels to the original Wassup! spots. It was a big hit by then. And we'd gotten used to our idea being referenced in the media.

On the Saturday night after this shoot, we were in the lobby of our hotel. We were tired and hungry.

Suddenly our phones went off at the same time. It was our friends and family calling to tell us that Saturday Night Live opened their new season with a parody of Wassup!

But rather than jumping up and down at this amazing news, we feigned excitement, hung up and got a steak.

The campaign went on to win every conceivable award and it reversed the decline in Bud sales. Good times!



.....

Vinny Warren was born and raised in Galway City. His first job in advertising was working for American ad legend Ed McCabe in New York. He then spent 9 years working on Budweiser and Bud Light at DDB Chicago. Vinny's advertising awards include the Cannes Grand Prix for film and TV, two Emmy nominations, best of show at the One Show and induction into the Clio Awards hall of fame. In 2007 he co-founded his own ad agency, The Escape Pod. Vinny is married and has three very Irish-looking kids - Kirsty, Fiona and Liam.

.....

© Vinny Warren 2019

Chops was conceived by Eoghan Nolan.

Designed and typeset by Gerry McCloskey

© Eoghan Nolan & Gerry McCloskey 2019

© [Artillery Brand](#) 2019

© [Brand Artillery](#) 2019

© Chops 2019

No part of this PDF may be reproduced without the written permission of both the author and Chops, the publisher.

If you know someone who would like a copy, please encourage them to download their own, free of charge, from artillerybrand.com

