



### CAUTION

**10. Abilify: "Bathrobe."** This campaign from Otsuka broke through in the complicated, highly regulated depression category and helped patients understand what actions they could take to feel better. Sue Manber, EVP strategic planning at Digitas, noted, "It took a brave client to use animation for a serious condition and deploy it in a highly appropriate way."



### CAUTION

**9. Zyrtec: "Pollen."** This decade-old Pfizer campaign from Deutsch is remembered for pushing the envelope with its black-and-white mid-century look. While its risks were more artistic/cultural than regulatory, it both succeeded and stood out in a highly competitive category.



### CAUTION

**8. Prevacid: "Heartbreak Hotel."** Another animated spot, this one used the ghost of Elvis Presley to drive its unforgettable imagery and storyline. One of our experts commented, "I really like this spot and still remember it, years later." Another noted, "It would never get approved today!"



### CAUTION

**7. Gilenya: "Take This!"** Novartis and Draftfcb Health scored with this campaign, which successfully took a risk—especially in terms of its deployment through social media. The campaign's positive attitude and creative messaging also made it risky, but memorable.



### CAUTION

**6. Zoloft: "Dot."** This Best ad was recognized again this year—it was named three out of 10 times for its riskiness and its effectiveness. Mike Rutstein, president of Strikeforce, noted its "unexpected empathy through illustration," while Doug Welch, SVP at McCann, stated, "It could have been perceived as trivializing depression, but it actually de-stigmatized it."



### CAUTION

**5. Chantix: "Testimonial/Mike."** For legal reasons, it's often very risky to use testimonials, so this campaign, which completely relied on them, took a big risk. But some of our respondents didn't think it was effective, stating, "The use of real people sounds compelling, but in execution the ads are boring, uninspiring. They could've taken the brand to a much different place."



### CAUTION

**4. Clarinex: "Outer Space."** This follow-up brand to Claritin missed the mark with its "announcement" ad, our experts said. One DTC market researcher noted that when doctors were shown the ad message of "true relief," they were appalled, even commenting, "What do you mean, was Claritin not true?" Another respondent called it a "terrible execution into a next drug."



### CAUTION

**3. Levitra: "Football."** Bayer's entry in the lively ED market a few years ago was deemed a risk that failed primarily because the creative execution was not too subtle—and, thus, backfired on the brand. Or, as one respondent put it, "Are you kidding me?"



### CAUTION

**2. Simponi: "Shoes."** This J&J brand took a risk with its visuals, but unlike the unobtrusive Levitra, Simponi was too subtle. The opening and closing of the ad offered brand information, but none of the visuals seemed connected to the story. "Too mysterious," claimed one of our experts.



### CAUTION

**1. Rozerem: "Abraham Lincoln and Beaver."** This campaign was mentioned more than any other in the survey as a failed risk. Respondents stated that its memorable creative just didn't sell the brand. Frank Chipman, VP at Lieberman Research, said, "It was a creative's fantasy, but lacked any real message." Erica Yahr, SVP strategic planning at McCann, noted, "Not effective. Period."



# M&M's 10 Riskiest DTC Ads Ever

Risk is a double-edged sword. Sometimes, an ad can push the envelope in terms of regulatory and still spur productive dialogue. Other times, a chancy ad backfires. Here's a countdown of 10 risk-taking ads—five that our industry experts thought truly succeeded, followed by five that might have done better. It's our shout-out to brands that took a risk. **Deborah Dick-Rath** reports