

# Super Bowl proves sex sells, but some see exploitation

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USA TODAY Sports' Josh Peter gives an inside look at the world of Super Bowl modeling work.



(Photo: Kirby Lee, USA TODAY Sports)

PHOENIX — With Super Bowl kickoff still a few days away, there's already a big winner: companies cashing in on sex appeal.

Talent agencies are supplying thousands of women to companies such as Hugo Boss, Maxim and BSN Supplements that want attractive women to serve as promotional models, party hostesses, servers and related positions.

"You have a lot of people trying to capitalize," said Aron Mezo, owner of PEM Models, based in Scottsdale, Ariz. "More and more companies are attaching their names to football."

Attaching their names to football — and women.

PUSH Marketing and Promotions, an agency also based in Scottsdale that touts its database of 60,000 models, estimates it will make hundreds of thousands of dollars during Super Bowl week. And while PUSH claims it is largest talent agency in the country, it's only one of dozens cashing in here.

Shayan Habib, co-owner of PUSH, said roughly 5,000 women working for various agencies will generate upwards of \$5 million.

The agencies are meeting the demand of companies throwing bashs this week, with sometimes-provocatively dressed women employed to grab the attention of Super Bowl fans not just in Glendale, the site the game, but in surrounding cities such as Scottsdale and Phoenix.



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"The Super Bowl, in particular, creates a platform for every brand to enter a market and get their brand in front of a very influential demographic of people," Habib said. "If you're not at the Super Bowl as a brand, then you're probably not a relevant brand."

Competition among the onslaught of brands at the Super Bowl has driven the increased use of sexually charged images and attractive women to grab attention from consumers, says Jason Jantzen, president of Phoenix Marketing Associates.

"Look at some of these Super Bowl parties, where corporations are attending these hiring events and literally just handpicking models," Jantzen said. "There's more competition in the marketplace than ever before and it's increasingly more difficult for brands to really stand out. One way they can stand out is by throwing a huge party at the biggest event in the world here at the Super Bowl."

"Ideally, their guests are going to have a great time. And they're going to party alongside some beautiful models."

## COMPETITIVE MARKET

That might be more challenging this year, according to Mezo, based in Scottsdale. He said the demand for models is three times higher than it was in 2008, the last time the Super Bowl was held in Arizona.

"And there's not three times the number of attractive models as in 2008," he said. "I think you're going to see some disappointment."

But Mezo also said agencies here won't rely strictly on local women. They also are recruited from out of town.



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"They stock the lakes, so to speak," he said.

The phenomenon has sparked a range of views. Jantzen, for one, sees a potential drawback for the companies investing in the sex-sells marketing strategy.

"Their return is hard to measure," he said. "But they're going to receive at least a short-term bump in positive brand equity and maybe even longer-term brand loyalty."

"But I think a lot of these companies need to ask themselves, 'Are there potential long-term ramifications when these images kind of trickle down the Internet and fall into the hands of their broader consumer base? Are they still going to feel the same way about that brand as they did before they saw those pictures?'"

"You don't necessarily have to be an extreme feminist to be offended by this."

Susan Berman, a women's rights advocate who is CEO of Fresh Start Women's Foundation — a non-profit agency in Phoenix that works with victims of domestic violence — said the marketing approach could have an unintended but harmful impact on efforts to curb sex trafficking.



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"If we are selling sex on commercials and by innuendo, and by these lovely women serving beer and the tilted kilt outfit or whatever, it's also whetting the appetite of an individual who might then want to go and purchase (sex)," Berman said. "So it is kind of one thing feeding into the other, and that is something that I think we as a society should be very cautious of."

## 'I MAKE A FAIR AMOUNT'

While the talent agencies are raking in millions of dollars, the women make far less. PUSH said its models will earn between \$20 and \$50 an hour — excluding the money spent getting ready to work.

Morgan David, 24, a part-time model and graduate of Arizona State University, said she'll spend \$50 on makeup, \$60 on her hair, \$70 on her nails and another \$40 on something she says are a must: spray tans.

For some models, there's an other price to pay, said Makenzie Gossage, 19, who's been working with PUSH for a year. Although she said she's had good experiences, she said that's not true for many other models.

"During Super Bowl week, like any big event there is obviously more going on, more people trying to get in on the action," she said. "Some agencies I know won't pay you. Some girls they put them in bikinis and just have them parade around and guys are all over them. Not a fun situation."

As for the discrepancy between what the models make and what the talent agencies make, Gossage said, "I enjoy what I am doing, and I think I make a fair amount to do it."

The agencies have the leverage, too, with the likes of PUSH — which has contracted to use 400 models this week — having amassed a database of 60,000 models from across the country. They say they are contacted online by at least 50 aspiring models a day, and that the Super Bowl is simply among the biggest of the events driving their profits.

"It's an industry that's taken off," Habib said.

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