



A Fan-Made Promo for "Bates Motel" Hits it Big

03.20.2014

Kellen Moore was one of those rare high school students who appreciate the art and craft behind great TV promos.

Back when Ryan Murphy was just starting to ascend to Hollywood royalty with his first show, "Nip/Tuck," Moore would wait with breathless anticipation for each new teaser heralding the next installment on FX.

"They weren't just trailers," he told Brief. "They were like short films in themselves. I loved that. They were so artistic and they were something I respected way before college."

After high school, Moore began pursuing a career in commercial filmmaking at Chapman College. Upon finishing his senior thesis, a "a dark take on Peter Pan," he found himself casting about for a project to keep his directing chops busy post-graduation. A&E's "Bates Motel," with its morbid undercurrents and eerie visuals, seemed like a good match to his current frame of mind, and Moore decided he would create his own :30 teaser for the premiere of the upcoming Season 2.

"I didn't do it with a big plan in mind," he said. "It was just like, 'What would be fun for me to do? What would look good on my reel?' And I had this concept for

Norman creating a house out of skin. I felt like it was a cheeky play on [the show's] iconic imagery while still being modern."

Armed with a budget of \$80, Moore crafted his skin-house from rubber kitchen gloves and pink cosmetic makeup. He lured a shoestring crew to his apartment to shoot the spot, feeding them with Goldfish crackers, and purchased stick-on wheels from Home Depot normally used for moving furniture. These, he placed on his tripod legs so as to give the camerawork a makeshift dolly effect. With the remaining \$25 in his budget, he rented a lens for a day to enhance the spot's moody tone.

When the resulting spot was completed, Moore tacked on a bumper of the number "2," culled from a piece of "Bates Motel" poster art that had just been released. This small addition, combined with a door-slamming musical flourish and the atmospheric of the footage that preceded it, created an uncannily on-brand piece of promo.

Pleased with the results, Moore decided to test and see if anyone could tell the difference. He proceeded to post the spot online as an "official" teaser for "Bates Motel" Season 2. Two days later, Moore received an email from Guy Slattery, EVP of marketing at A&E Network. The executive wanted to talk.

Upon posting, the spot had immediately begun garnering attention online, with fans chiming in about their excitement for the upcoming season, and even some news publications making note of it.

"We've always been interested in people creating content around our shows," Slattery said, "but it's rare that you find something as polished and well produced as the spot Kellen put online. It fooled the press and fooled the studio and it fooled the show's creators. We had never seen anything quite like this before."

At first, Slattery thought Moore felt like he might be in trouble for his ruse, "but I was just interested to speak with him and hear how he'd done the shoot. He told me he'd made it for 80 bucks, which to me was a revelation. We don't make anything for 80 bucks around here. And when he explained how he had made the house [that you see], I was fascinated."

By the time a 45-minute phone call with Moore was over, Slattery had offered him the chance to make a new promo for "Bates Motel," this time with a budget bigger than \$80.

Moore was about to receive a paid lesson in what it takes to be successful in shortform. Given access to four scripts from the upcoming season, he had to quickly come up with 15 concepts for :30 teasers. Having become accustomed to working with a budget of virtually nil, he was suddenly being asked by A&E to

"dream in an ideal sense: What if there were no restrictions? What if I had access to [cast members] Freddie Highmore and Vera Farmiga? I could let my mind go places with this brandâ€¦ It was like Christmas every time I talked to them."

The spot that A&E eventually accepted depicts cast member Nestor Carbonell, as Sheriff Alex Romero, looking out at the camera through what initially appears to be a hole in a wall. The camera zooms out and rises in one fluid take to reveal he's actually peering into the eye socket of a murder victim's blown-out head.

[Pictured: Moore on-set with Nestor Carbonell.]

"He's got a little bit of a twisted mind but that's perfect for this show," said Slattery. "He went and made the spot and we were really happy with the results. The talent was really happy as well. Nestor had no idea that [Moore] was a first-time director of a big shoot like this, and he said he loved working with him. They must have taught [Moore] very well in film school, because he's very assured. He had a very clear vision in his mind."

For A&E, Slattery continued, "a big part of the creative process is letting people who have a passionate idea really run with it." Obviously, not every fan-made piece of content has the vision and panache of Moore's \$80 promo (or the balls to pretend its an official network upload), but, Slattery said, "The tools are available to anybody now. "This is a great story for anyone who wants to get into the business, or who is in the business but wants to make promos - to realize there's a really direct way to doing it. It's just doing it."

[Images courtesy of A&E.]