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## **Dead-enbacher' pops back to life: Orville resurrected in new ads**

By Donna Goodison

Orville Redenbacher is back shilling his eponymous gourmet popcorn - not a bad gig for someone who suffered a heart attack and drowned in a whirlpool spa more than 11 years ago.

The folksy, bespectacled Redenbacher, who would have turned 100 this year, has been digitally recreated for a new advertising campaign. The first TV commercial featuring "him" in his trademark bowtie debuted last week.

But the popcorn frontman no longer conjures up images of Midwestern wholesomeness. Catcalls from advertising circles include "Deadenbacher," "America's first pitchzombie," "Frankensteined" - and just plain creepy. The digital Redenbacher's mouth isn't in synch with his speech, and he bobs around like a marionette at the commercial's end.

Respondents to an Advertising Age poll yesterday were overwhelmingly against button-pushing Miami advertising agency Crispin Porter + Bogusky's work for ConAgra Foods, owner of the Redenbacher brand. Eighty-two percent said it wasn't right to digitally resurrect Redenbacher for the spot.

Carrying on the spirit of Redenbacher was a fine idea, but badly executed, said Claude Singer, a partner at Lippincott Mercer, a New York brand strategy firm. "You would think a big agribusiness like ConAgra would want to be associated with a real human being, not some manipulated technology," he said. "The character is very artificial, and there's nothing about it that's warm and appealing."

Redenbacher's family apparently approves of the computer-generated version of Redenbacher by Hollywood special-effects company Digital Domain Inc.

"Grandpa would have loved these new ads," grandson Gary Redenbacher, who appeared in some older ads, said in a ConAgra press release. "These ads capture the passion, sincerity, pride and commitment grandpa brought to television viewers night after night."

While the ad is nostalgic for some viewers, many believe it doesn't do Redenbacher justice. "He was a serious figure in that brand, and they're really making fun of him,"

said **Kel Kelly**, CEO of **Kel & Partners**, a Westboro marketing firm. “A lot of people are offended by it.”

Good or bad buzz aside, ConAgra claimed more than 35 million people saw the campaign, or mentions of it, within three days of its debut, Advertising Age said.

Crispin Porter, which also created the jarring Volkswagen crash commercials, resorted to the bomb-throwing school of advertising, said Bob Hoffman, president of Gearon Hoffman, a Boston brand communications firm.

“Bringing this guy back was in bad taste, which is not a good thing to say about a food product,” Hoffman said.