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Salesforce.com Buys Ads Around Super Bowl Halftime

Marc Benioff, CEO of Salesforce.com, sells services to businesses rather than consumer products. But he also likes to make a splash, and his company's first-ever TV ads are a case in point.



Photo courtesy of Marc Benioff

Salesforce.com CEO Marc Benioff and will.i.am at a December benefit concert for the Benioff Children's Hospital at the University of California, San Francisco.

The San Francisco-based company, a pioneer in Web-based software, has purchased airtime immediately before and after halftime at the Super Bowl for animated commercials that were developed with help from will.i.am—front man for the Black Eyed Peas, the band slated to perform during the halftime show.

Benioff says he wants to reach the widest possible audience as his company launches a new incarnation of [Chatter](#), an offering released last June that styles itself as a kind of Facebook to let people inside companies collaborate and share information. Until recently, Chatter was a paid add-on for businesses that use Salesforce.com's other services, which include tools to help users track customers and sales leads. In recent months, the company introduced a stripped-down version of the collaboration tool for free for Salesforce.com customers.

The next version, launching Jan. 31, will for the first time let people at companies that are not Salesforce.com users sign up for the free and paid service. The company will also launch a related Web address, [chatter.com](#).



Courtesy salesforce.com

Salesforce.com's Super Bowl ads will feature the "Baby Peas," a group of animated characters created by will.i.am that represent the Black Eyed Peas, the band slated to perform during the halftime show.

It's a variation on the "freemium" strategy used by many Web companies: try to get employees hooked on free Chatter accounts and hope businesses will upgrade to a more feature-rich subscription service and possibly buy other Salesforce.com offerings.

To do that, "we really need to launch Chatter.com in a big way," Benioff says. "I can't think of anything bigger to do than launch it at the Super Bowl."

Ideas for the commercial, Benioff says, were hatched last year while hanging out by a pool at a Los Angeles hotel with will.i.am, known before he adopted that stage name as William Adams Jr.

Will.i.am says he wrote, directed and penned the tagline for the Chatter ads, adding that it was his first time directing a commercial. The spots will

feature the first appearance of the "Baby Peas," a group of animated characters on which he plans to base a series of longer episodes to be aired on television and the Web and that will include musical numbers, will.i.am says.

The ads will also feature "Chatty, the magical cloud," an animated character representing Chatter, Benioff says.

The ads will span the 30 seconds preceding and 15 seconds following the halftime show and will meld with the Black Eyed Peas performance, a Salesforce.com spokeswoman says. At the end of the first ad, an animated version of will.i.am will exit the screen just before the live will.i.am walks on stage to perform, she says.

Salesforce.com isn't the first tech company the rapper-singer-producer has thrown his name behind recently. On Monday, Intel [announced](#) that will.i.am will work with the chip maker on marketing—and possibly even on its technology. (3)

"I'm trying to hang out with the people who make things happen," will.i.am says, adding that he used Chatter to collaborate with Salesforce.com on its Super Bowl ads. "Geeks are cooler than the cool people...In my world, geeks are the coolest."

Salesforce.com declined to say how much it spent on the ads, but Benioff says "they're big numbers." Marketers and ad buyers have [estimated](#) that a 30-second spot during the upcoming Super Bowl cost between \$2.8 million and \$3 million, up from \$2.5 million to \$2.9 million last year.

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