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Ohio Lottery Trades the Promise of Riches for the Joy of Instant Gratification

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COMMERCIALS from state lotteries tend to highlight the opulence that awaits winners, but a new campaign from the Ohio Lottery takes a more unusual approach. It makes no mention of winning, focusing instead on the pleasure that some instant-game players derive from scratching the opaque resin from the cards.

A series of new commercials features a man who is so enthralled with scratching that, when he does not have a lottery ticket handy, he finds other ways to, well, scratch his itch. In one spot, the actor [Tim Stoltenberg](#) visits a store called [Everything Wool](#), emerging from the dressing room under so many layers of the itchy fabric that he appears to be wearing a fat suit.

As he backs into a doorway to ecstatically rub his back against the door frame, a voice-over announces, “Get ready to scratch.” The man soon finds himself, still clad in wool, at a convenience store, happily scratching a ticket.

In another commercial, he flings off a tracksuit and jumps into a [patch of poison ivy](#). In another, he [stands in a swamp](#) until he is covered with mosquito bites. Each of the spots also ends with him at a convenience store counter playing a scratch-off game.

The campaign, by the Marcus Thomas agency in Cleveland, was introduced on Aug. 1 and includes radio and mobile advertising.

Projected spending for the campaign is \$4.3 million. For the fiscal year that ended on June 30, the Ohio Lottery spent \$12.6 million on advertising, with 41 percent of that focusing on scratch-off games. This year it expects to increase the portion of instant-ticket advertising to as much as 60 percent.

This is the first time, though, that the commercials will promote instant games in general, rather than focusing on the theme of a specific game. The spots have what marketers call a doughnut, meaning that there is a natural break in the middle where, in this case, an eight-second segment that promotes specific games is inserted into the 30-second spots. (The break is between the sections where the actor makes himself itchy and scratches cards at the store counter.)

Glenda Terrell, an account supervisor at Marcus Thomas, said the idea that consumers enjoyed scratching cards irrespective of winning was not just a whimsical ad premise.

“The people we’ve talked to have said how much fun and joy they get from scratching off a ticket,” Ms. Terrell said, referring to focus groups. “One gentleman shared that he keeps a few instants in his wallet so when the day is getting a little heavy at work or he’s feeling a little down or frustrated, he can pull out an instant ticket and he can scratch it off, and it erases that down feeling and just resets his day and he’s feeling positive again.”

Among Americans who played some form of lottery game in the previous month, 42 percent agreed with the statement “I enjoy playing lottery games even when I don’t win,” and among the most dedicated players — those who spent more than \$30 a month playing — 57 percent agreed, according to a 2011 report by Mintel, a market research firm.

In a [campaign introduced last November](#) for the New York Lottery, the scratch-off games were promoted not so much for the possibility that they could make winners rich as for how they could enable them to worry less about money. In the commercials, winners ponder esoteric questions like “If drums are played by a drummer, why is a guitar not played by a ‘guitarer’?” and a voice-over asks, “What will you think about when you don’t have to think about money?”

Scratch-off instant tickets, which have smaller payouts than daily or weekly numbers drawings but also have better odds, were introduced by the Massachusetts lottery in 1974, and that state “remains the world leader in marketing scratch cards,” Terri Markle, the publisher of [La Fleur’s Magazine](#), a Maryland-based trade publication that tracks 42 American lotteries, wrote in an email message.

Massachusetts residents spend an average of \$126 annually on instant tickets, making per capita spending there the highest by a wide margin. Georgia ranks second, with per capita spending of \$74 annually, according to data from La Fleur’s. Ohio ranks 12th, with residents spending an average of \$33 a year on scratch-offs.

In part because of higher-priced offerings, with Texas and Minnesota marketing some scratch-off tickets that cost \$50, total instant-ticket sales for United States lotteries grew to \$37.5 billion in the 12 months that ended June 30, an increase of 84 percent from a decade earlier. Sales of non-instant lottery games lagged, with \$25.1 billion in annual sales, according to the La Fleur’s data.

In Ohio, where the highest-priced instant ticket costs \$30, the new campaign promises the introduction every month of new scratch-off games, including one based on “The Walking Dead,” the popular AMC show, and one on the cartoon character Betty Boop.

Ms. Terrell, from the Marcus Thomas agency, said that for marketing purposes the lottery divided consumers into two segments based on the games they prefer, with those who play the daily and weekly numbers called dreamers and scratch-off players called realists.

“Their expectation isn’t that they’re going to win all the time,” Ms. Terrell said of the scratchers. “Their expectation is that they really define winning as the opportunity to enjoy the fun of scratching off the ticket.”