KILL DULL™

PUBLISHED READING NO. 01

RED BULL

Was Red Bull right to say yes to a split personality?

A cartoon that never got old.
A world that never stopped pushing.

A READING BY
KILL DULL

JUDGED ACROSS
12 STANDARDS · 3 LENSES

AS OF
10 NOVEMBER 2026

DRAFT · NOT YET SIGNED

WHAT YOU'RE READING.

A PUBLISHED READING

A Published Reading is Kill Dull's judgment of a marketing decision a company has already made, out in the world. It is built from the public record alone: what the company has said, what it has done, and what independent sources have measured. Every source is listed.

The decision goes through the full interrogation: twelve Standards, three lenses, the strongest case on each side, and what we don't know. AI researches and argues both sides. Every ruling is human. Then it is published, so the judgment is on the record for anyone to read and challenge.

This Reading was made without a word from Red Bull.

HOW MUCH DEEPER A PRIVATE READING GOES

A Published Reading only sees what a company chose to show. A Private Reading starts from the inside, before the decision is made.

You make the case: the commitment, why you believe in it, and the evidence that matters, including the research, numbers and plans no outsider sees. We interview the people closest to the decision. If something material is missing, we ask. Every Standard is then tested against your evidence, not against assumptions from the outside.

You receive more than a verdict. You receive the reasoning: what the evidence supports, what it doesn't, what remains uncertain,

where the judges agree and where they don't. Signed, confidential, and yours, while there is still time to change course.

THIS READING

THE DECISION	Red Bull said yes to two voices, cartoons and the extreme world, and keeps saying yes.	THE BET	One idea, "gives you wings", is stronger told two ways: as a joke and as proof.
THE RISK	Two voices blur what Red Bull is, and each undercuts the other.	JUDGED	As an ongoing decision, as of 10 November 2026. Promotion.

TWO VOICES. ONE CLAIM. THIRTY-NINE YEARS.

THE CARTOON VOICE		THE EXTREME WORLD
	1988	Dolomitenmann, the first event
	1989	Gerhard Berger, the first athlete
The first cartoon spots	Late 1980s / early 1990s	
	1992	Flugtag
	2005	Buys a Formula 1 team
	2007	Red Bull Media House
Penguins: one style for 15 years, Red Bull tells the UK regulator	2012	Stratos
171 countries, 125+ spots, one punchline	2017	
Cartoon in the Super Bowl	2025	900+ athletes, 1,350+ events a year
Cartoon in the Super Bowl again	2026	

THE DECISION

A light, self-mocking cartoon campaign on television, and a high-stakes world of extreme sport, events and media. Red Bull never merged them and never dropped either. There is no single date: the choice is renewed every year both run.

THE CONTEXT

Red Bull launched in Austria in 1987 and created the energy drink category. “Gives you wings” was written to guide the whole company: what doesn’t give wings isn’t done. Both voices began within the same few years.

TODAY

Both voices are still running. The extreme world spans 900+ athletes and 1,350+ events a year; the cartoon has moved onto the Super Bowl, two years running, at up to $10 million a slot.

COMPETING EXPLANATIONS

First mover, sampling, the extreme world alone, or the cartoons alone could each explain the growth. No public source separates them. The Reading judges the split on its logic and evidence, not on Red Bull’s size.

02 · THE NUMBERS

THE CARTOON IS NOT A LEFTOVER.

98	93

Brand recognition, 2025 Super Bowl cartoon

Super Bowl average: 78

Brand recognition, 2026 Super Bowl cartoon

Super Bowl average: 78

4.2

Stars, predicted long-term growth, 2026

Super Bowl average: 2.7

13.969bn

Cans sold in 2025

Up 10.2% on 2024

Brand recognition is System1's Fluency Rating: the share of viewers who know whose ad it was. Stars predict long-term share growth, on a scale to 5.9.

03 · THE INTERROGATION

TWELVE STANDARDS. THREE LENSES. EVERY SIDE ARGUED.

Open any Standard to see the evidence, the strongest case on each side, what we don't know, and Kill Dull's ruling.

01 Relevance

Does this matter to the people we need to matter to?

HERE

Does each voice reach people the other can’t?

EVIDENCE

The cartoons run in 171 countries and now in the Super Bowl. The extreme world reaches people through events, athletes and media Red Bull owns.

> DEEPER
>
> The extreme world spans 900+ athletes, artists and teams and 1,350+ events a year; the business sells in 178 countries.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
Two voices widen the reach. The cartoons speak to a broad audience that will never watch a cliff dive; the extreme world speaks to the core who care about performance.	Being relevant to everyone can mean being urgent to no one. The core buyer may read the cartoons as meant for someone else.

WHAT WE DON’T KNOW

Who each voice actually reaches.

KILL DULL’S RULING

AAH.

02 Distinctiveness

Does this make the company easier to recognize or easier to replace?

HERE

Is the cartoon style the most recognizable thing Red Bull owns?

EVIDENCE

One style, unchanged for three decades. 98% awareness in the German target group.

> DEEPER
>
> Independent testing: viewers recognised Red Bull at 98 in 2025 and 93 in 2026, against a Super Bowl average of 78. The strongest evidence in this Reading.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
A hand-drawn style held for thirty years is hard to copy without looking like a Red Bull ad. Two distinctive assets are harder to replace than one.	Sponsoring extreme sport is easier for rivals to copy than a drawing style. If the extreme world becomes the face, the most distinctive asset is the one used less.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

Which voice people link to Red Bull.

KILL DULL'S RULING

AAH.

03 Value

Does this build perceived value or spend it?

HERE

Does the joke cheapen the premium the athletes earn?

EVIDENCE

A 48% value share in Germany in 2016. Up to $10 million for a Super Bowl slot spent on a cartoon.

> DEEPER
>
> The 2026 cartoon rated 4.2 Stars against a Super Bowl average of 2.7. Sales and turnover kept growing in 2025. Neither isolates the cartoon.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
Humour lowers the stakes of buying: a can is not a pledge to jump from space. The brand holds its premium with both voices running.	Simple drawings beside the most expensive stunts can make the drink feel ordinary. The extreme world builds value a cartoon may spend.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

How each voice affects what people will pay.

KILL DULL'S RULING

HMM.

04 Credibility

Will people believe this from us?

HERE

Does “gives you wings” work as both a joke and a proof?

EVIDENCE

Red Bull told the UK regulator its cartoons show the impossible with humour and are not meant literally.

> DEEPER
>
> The claim was tested in US courts. Red Bull settled for over $13 million, denied wrongdoing, and revised the challenged claims. The challenge was to the literal promise, not the joke.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
The joke makes the claim believable by never asking to be taken literally. The athletes show what it stands for. Each voice covers the other’s weak spot.	The cartoon treats wings as a gag; the extreme world treats them as real. A reader may wonder which Red Bull means.

WHAT WE DON’T KNOW

Whether people believe both voices come from one brand.

KILL DULL’S RULING

AAH.

05 Delivery

Can we deliver what this decision asks people to believe?

HERE

Can a drink deliver what either voice promises?

EVIDENCE

The cartoons show the impossible and are not meant literally. The claim drives everything Red Bull does.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
The cartoon promise is deliberately impossible, so it cannot be broken. The extreme world shows people doing hard things, not the drink doing them.	The extreme world puts the can beside human performance, where the joke's protection does not reach.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

Whether the extreme voice or the functional claims drew the 2014 lawsuit.

KILL DULL'S RULING

AAH.

06 Coherence

Does this make the company add up better?

HERE

One idea in two registers, or two brands under one name?

EVIDENCE

The claim is the filter for everything. Mateschitz said the drink and the media both communicate “The World of Red Bull”. Both voices began in the same few years.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
Both voices express one claim and have run together since the first years. The split is a range of tone within one idea, as a person can be funny and serious.	Coherence is judged by what people see, not what a company intends. Someone who meets only one voice gets half a brand.

WHAT WE DON’T KNOW

Whether people see one brand or two.

KILL DULL’S RULING

AAH.

07 Ownership

What about this can genuinely become ours?

HERE

Could a rival copy either voice alone, or only both together?

EVIDENCE

Red Bull owns its events and its media rather than renting them. One agency has made the cartoons from the start.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
The extreme world is owned as property; the cartoons through thirty years of consistency. Rivals can copy a part; the combination is Red Bull's alone.	A tone is owned only as long as it is kept. Property can be bought by rivals; a style can be imitated cheaply.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

Whether rivals have tried either voice.

KILL DULL'S RULING

AAH.

08 Identity

Does this make the company more itself or less itself?

HERE

Which voice is the real Red Bull?

EVIDENCE

Both voices from the first years. Stratos and Media House on one side; the cartoons on the Super Bowl on the other.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
Red Bull has always been both. Keeping both is staying itself; dropping either would be the change.	The extreme world may have become the face the public knows best. The cartoons may be identity kept by habit.

WHAT WE DON’T KNOW

Which voice people name when asked what Red Bull is.

KILL DULL’S RULING

HMM.

09 Precedent

What will this yes make easier to say yes to next?

HERE

Did keeping two voices make room for more?

EVIDENCE

Red Bull Media House in 2007, “our most important line extension so far”. The cartoons on the Super Bowl in 2025 and 2026.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
Once a brand holds two registers, a third comes naturally: Red Bull became a media company. The cartoon could move to new stages without losing itself.	A brand that can be anything can drift into anything. Each new voice relies on the filter “does it give wings?” holding.

WHAT WE DON’T KNOW

What Red Bull has turned down because it failed that filter.

KILL DULL’S RULING

AAH.

10

Compounding

What happens if we keep doing this?

HERE

Do the two voices strengthen each other over decades, or wear thin?

EVIDENCE

More than 125 spots in 171 countries, one punchline. From about 1 million cans in 1987 to over 6 billion in 2016.

> DEEPER
>
> 13.969 billion cans in 2025, up 10.2%. The cartoons still test well above average.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
Thirty years of one style compound into memory no new campaign can buy. The business grew throughout.	Compounding cuts both ways. A style that never changes can age; an extreme world needs ever-bigger feats.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

Whether the cartoons' effect is rising or falling.

KILL DULL'S RULING

HMM.

11 Alignment

What else has to move for this to work?

HERE

What does running both voices demand of the company?

EVIDENCE

One claim and one lead agency from the start. A media company of its own. Mateschitz accepted the teams were not yet profitable, valuing their media worth.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
The filter “does it give wings?” aligns every decision, so two voices need no separate rules.	Two very different crafts sit in one company. The extreme voice demands money and patience the cartoons do not.

WHAT WE DON’T KNOW

The spending split between the voices.

KILL DULL’S RULING

AAH.

12

Stewardship

What must we protect while we change?

HERE

What must never change for both voices to keep working?

EVIDENCE

The claim and the cartoon concept, unchanged for three decades. The 2025 Super Bowl spot retold a penguin story first seen by 2012.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
Red Bull has protected the claim and the style for thirty years while everything around them changed.	Protecting both voices means neither can evolve freely. What needs protecting may be the claim, not either voice.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

What Red Bull itself treats as untouchable.

KILL DULL'S RULING

AAH.

Human Nature

What will people actually notice, want, believe, remember, resist or choose?

HERE

Which voice do people remember, and does it matter which?

EVIDENCE

98% awareness in Germany's target group. A cartoon chosen for the Super Bowl, two years running.

> DEEPER
>
> Viewers remember whose ad the cartoon is: 98 and 93 against an average of 78. No equivalent public measure exists for the extreme world.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
People remember a joke and they remember danger; Red Bull gives them both under one line.	People tend to remember one thing about a brand. They may never connect the cartoon on TV with the athlete on the mountain.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

Recall data for each voice.

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AAH.

Conditions

What could change what this decision means? Culture, economics, technology, politics, the planet.

HERE

What in the world around Red Bull could make the split stronger or weaker?

EVIDENCE

UK complaints about energy drink cartoons and children. The cartoons moving into new media.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
Short, wordless, hand-drawn stories may travel well on new screens.	Tighter rules on marketing energy drinks to young people could land on the cartoon style first. Scrutiny of risk in extreme sport could land on the other voice.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

How far the cartoons have moved into new media is direct knowledge, not yet sourced.

KILL DULL'S RULING

HMM.

Time

What strengthens? What erodes? What compounds?

HERE

What does time do to the split?

EVIDENCE

Three decades of one style, now on bigger stages. Every stunt must top the last.

THE CASE FOR	THE CASE AGAINST
Strengthens: the cartoon style. Compounds: the claim, which both voices keep repeating.	Erodes: possibly novelty, as every stunt must top the last.

WHAT WE DON’T KNOW

Whether the balance between the voices is shifting.

KILL DULL’S RULING

HMM.

FIFTEEN RULINGS.

AAH. 10 HMM. 5

DULL. 0

THE TENSIONS

- **Coherence against Distinctiveness.** If the split costs coherence, but the cartoon is the most distinctive thing Red Bull owns, which weighs more?
- **Credibility against Delivery.** The joke protects the promise; the stunts stretch it. Do they balance?
- **Identity against Stewardship.** Are the cartoons Red Bull's identity, or a habit it protects?

THE VERDICT · DRAFT, NOT YET SIGNED

AAH.

The reasoning that carries the verdict will appear here when Kill Dull signs it.

WHAT WOULD CHANGE OUR MIND

- Evidence that the core buyer rejects the cartoon voice.
- Evidence that markets running fewer cartoons perform the same.
- A ban on cartoon advertising for energy drinks in a major market.

- Evidence that people cannot link the two voices to one brand.

SOURCES

Built from the public record. Every source below was opened on 10 November 2026. AI researched and argued both sides; every ruling is Kill Dull's.

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2. Gives You Wings: 30 years of cartoons by Red Bull, Karikaturmuseum Krems, 2017 (https://karikaturmuseum.at/en/regard/exhibitions/3-gives-you-wings)
3. How Red Bull became a billion-dollar global empire, loveMONEY (https://www.lovemoney.com/galleries/amp/314741/how-red-bull-became-a-billiondollar-global-empire)
4. Red Bull CEO Dietrich Mateschitz on brand as media company, Fast Company, 17 February 2012 (https://www.fastcompany.com/1679907/red-bull-ceo-dietrich-mateschitz-on-brand-as-media-company)
5. Red Bull's billionaire maniac becomes a media mogul, NBC News, c. 2011 (https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna43112711)
6. ASA ruling on Red Bull Company Ltd, 13 June 2012 (https://www.asa.org.uk/rulings/red-bull-company-ltd-a12-185178.html)
7. Red Bull Super Bowl 2025 TV Spot, 'Flying Penguins', iSpot.tv (https://image.ispot.tv/ad/TZjK/red-bull-super-bowl-2025-flying-penguins)
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9. The Most Distinctive Ads of the Big Game, System1, 11 February 2025 (https://system1group.com/blog/best-branding-in-super-bowl-lix)
10. America's Favorite Super Bowl LX Ads, System1, 9 February 2026 (https://system1group.com/blog/americas-favorite-super-bowl-lx-ads)
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13. Red Bull Company: facts and figures, Red Bull, end 2025 (https://www.redbull.com/ke-en/company)
14. Red Bull Puts Up $13M To Settle False Advertising Suit, Law360, 1 August 2014 (https://www.morellilaw.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Red-Bull-Article.pdf)