



Marketing Messages

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Social responsibility advertising trend riding on the wings of Dove

Advertising has the power to move and compel. It can persuade and position. And sometimes it can even aspire to evoke social change. A lofty goal, but one Dove has set since launching their “campaign for real beauty” to counter the negative self esteem influences of perfect body images used in fashion and cosmetics advertising to young women.

A **Harvard University** study conducted globally with 3,300 young girls and women indicated that more than two-thirds of those surveyed expressed that they strongly agreed with the statement “Media and advertising set an unrealistic standard of beauty that most women can’t ever achieve”. Nine out of ten respondents wanted to change something about their body. And 67% said they withdrew from everyday activities because they felt badly about the way they looked. Only 2% of women felt comfortable describing themselves as beautiful. These statistics are shocking and shameful. As the study indicates, it is a fair assumption to connect media and advertising influences as a contributing factor to unrealistic body image expectations. And that is where socially responsible marketing and advertising requires sober second thought. Enter Dove and the “campaign for real beauty.”

In September 2004 Dove launched their campaign with an evocative series of ads. They featured real women and unconventional beauty on billboards. Boldly showing no product and minimal branding, freckles, wrinkles and curvy bodies were placed in the spotlight. It was a definite departure from what others in the fashion and cosmetics industry were doing. Dove made themselves vulnerable and they let women talk. By questioning the accepted definition of beauty, the goal was to help women change the way they perceive their bodies and encouraged them to feel beautiful every day. The campaign was so successful, that the brand has experienced double-digit growth in every category. And the success continues. Current ads feature real women with real bodies and real curves. The campaign is intended to celebrate diversity by challenging today’s stereotypical view of beauty. Although the company no doubt desired sales and market share increases, the campaign for real beauty has gone far beyond driving the bottom line. Those involved want to drive actual social change. In fact **Janet Kestin, Co-Chief Creative Officer, Ogilvy and Mather**, Toronto, the agency responsible globally for the brand, states emphatically, “Dove IS a movement. We are creating a cult”.

The brand’s commitment to inspiring positive self-image among women has extended to initiatives that support a wider definition of beauty. The Dove Self Esteem Global Fund was launched in spring 2005 to help teach young women about self esteem issues. They work with schools and Girl Guides to deliver the “True You” program, featuring a book of activities to provoke dialogue on self-image issues between young girls and their female mentors. They have partnered with NEDIC, the National Eating Disorder Information Centre, to help promote healthy body image.

The Dove campaign for real beauty as a global effort is intended to serve as a starting point for societal change and act as a catalyst for widening the definition and discussion of beauty. “It takes 30 years to realize social change,” says Sharon MacLeod, Marketing Manager, Dove Master brand, Unilever Canada, “and we are committed to our approach.”

Other businesses have ventured into this field to a lesser degree. The **Reitmans** “real fashion for real life” campaign featured clothes conceived, designed and priced for real women, not runway models. The campaign depicts real women as they actually live. The quirky approach of strutting like a fashion model down the runway of life, getting on a bus, doing laundry, going to work, buying groceries or picking up the kids struck a chord with women. The media buy used print, billboards and TV. It was funny and it was a departure from the ordinary. It poked fun at the fashion industry and it was seen as authentic. Although we have yet to see the brands long-term commitment to this approach, it does represent movement towards a responsible ideal.

Can marketing and advertising evoke and support social change? Time will tell. But as marketers we should recognize the power that media can yield, and the ability we have to support these efforts.

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