



Marketing Messages

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Lululemon's mansy joke missed the marketing mark

"We just wanted to have some fun. We don't take ourselves too seriously," responded **Sarah Gardiner, Communications Manager for Lululemon** in Vancouver, BC to their recent ad featuring the "mansy". On April 1st, the day the mansy was promised to arrive in limited quantities, Lululemon fessed up to an April fools joke.

In case you missed it, the full-page ad featured a buff male striking a yoga pose on Vancouver's Kits beach wearing the mansy, a clingy one piece featuring a high cut leg and thong for men. It ran in urban weeklies across Canada and the US. The small type on the ad explained the mansy would be available in limited quantities on April 1st. That, along with their communications people refusing to comment on the ad when it first ran, was a pretty good indication that it was a stunt. An April fools joke. Good one Lululemon, or was it?

My initial response to the ad:

A Lululemon full-page ad? They never do full page print ads. That's different. Someone new must be handling the advertising. Oh, I really wish I hadn't seen that. Nice buff body, but not even that can save him from the visual tragedy and the reason why women never want their man to wear a Speedo. Too much information on the high leg cut. Maybe it's a subtle target at the gay community? Oh, it's available April 1st. This must be a joke. Maybe. So even if it is a joke, why are they doing this? Is it to generate talk and free publicity? Even if it is a joke and a publicity stunt, how does it speak to the target group? It seems to be male centered humour, not female. Their product line split indicates a strong female skew. Women will look at this and say, what were they thinking? Oh my God, maybe it isn't a joke. I might actually see a guy wearing it. Why am I feeling uncomfortable? This is a huge a departure from their core message and who their target is.

My initial conclusion:

Someone new must be doing the advertising. They've done it for free and made it cutting edge so they can prove how they can generate publicity and talk. Plus, they want to enter it in an awards show. Male creative directors will love it and shower them in awards. There will be a lot of back-slapping and jokes about how brilliant it was. The women in the room, and a large part of the target group, should Lululemon actually care about how advertising drives sales, will scratch their heads and wonder what happened to the brand that they thought they had an emotional connection with?

Was it irreverent and in keeping with the companies culture or did it show a disconnect with the predominantly female customer base? Advertising executives in Vancouver, where Lululemon has their head office, gave it a mixed review. **Andeen Pitt, VP Media and Business Development, Wasserman and Partners Advertising** said, the day after the ad broke, "I can't believe it's not real. Why else would they take such a risk?" **Victoria Gray, General Manager, Taxi West**, remarked, "I'm curious to hear what the follow up on this is. I totally agree with your conclusions." Once the news was out, Gray commented, "What was the point? I'm kind of stunned. How does that make us feel, as their target group, more affinity towards the brand? What does it gain them?" Admittedly this analysis may be too deep for something that was created in house and done for fun. But it does call for pause to consider how all messaging should be true to a brand and its target group.

And for those women breathing a sigh of relief that they won't hazard a chance encounter with a mansy clad guy anytime soon, the assurance may be premature. "We've had phone calls and people coming into the store wanting to buy it," says Gardiner. "We are a company that responds to customer feedback. If we see enough interest, we may have to produce it." Only in Vancouver.

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