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THE REAL IMPACT OF REAL BEAUTY

Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign turns 10 and still gets big views on YouTube, but has it really changed the industry?

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KRISTIN LAIRD | SEPTEMBER 01, 2014

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It's been a decade, but Sharon MacLeod still vividly recalls the moment she heard the pitch for the "Campaign for Real Beauty." Janet Kestimer, Ogilvy & Mather Toronto's co-creative director at the time, had brought a number of creative executions back from a brainstorming session in New York. The regional creatives had to sell the idea to the local marketers like MacLeod.

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“I remember seeing it and saying, ‘This is better than anything else we’re running now. We’re running other advertising, we’ll cut that other budget and shift that campaign,’” recalls MacLeod, who was senior brand manager, Dove skin cleansing, reporting up to Unilever Canada’s marketing vice-president Geoff Craig. “That was a big moment, but it felt absolutely right.”



(<http://www.marketingmag.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/DoveTicks.jpg>)

The campaign debuted in October 2004 with “Tick Box”—a series of product-less ads that showed non-model women and encouraged consumers to participate in the campaign by giving their opinions with questions such as “wrinkled or wonderful” and “fat or fab.”

It was a radical departure for a personal care brand to embark on a socially driven movement that challenged stereotypes of women and the culture of advertising at a time when the never-ending pursuit for perfection was at a boiling point thanks to a growing obsession with celebrity and cosmetic surgery. “Dove provided compelling evidence that women are hungry for campaigns that tell the truth, that reveal real problems that women face, not the invented problems that the beauty industry concocts in order to create markets for new products,” says Johanna Blakley, from the University of Southern California’s Norman Lear Center, which focuses on the societal impact of media and entertainment. “I think it was brilliant for Dove to tackle the underlying issues around self-esteem rather than preying on women’s lack of it. What better way to build trust with your customers?”

Over the last 10 years, the brand has received plenty of praise like this for its gutsy approach to “keeping it real.” Many hoped it would be a catalyst for change in beauty marketing and it’s often been described as a game-changer. But looking back over the last 10 years, has the “Campaign for Real Beauty” changed the marketing game at



all?



Marketing experts have differing opinions on the influence the campaign has had on the industry or the way brands market to female consumers. Some believe that brands still exploit female insecurities to sell, while others credit Dove for addressing key issues and starting a wave of social experiment advertising.

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**CONSULTANT, FOUNDER & CEO,
IFWERANTHEWORLD**

The good news is, it's made brands be more thoughtful about the way they market to women. The bad news is, if you're not a brand prepared to put the work into finding your own truth, it can send you down the superficial path of 'Let's find something women feel insecure about and empower them by telling them not to worry about it!'

*Stephanie Nerlich*
PRESIDENT & CEO, GREY CANADA

I did really like last year's "Sketches". It put the issue in real consumer context from the voice of women, and allowed the brand to have a point of view on the issue as opposed to the brand creating an issue for an ad. It's a subtle difference but an important one.

See the most recent chatter around "Patches." Did Dove find a group of women just gullible enough or insecure enough to believe a patch could make them feel more beautiful or was it so controlled by the brand that it lost that genuineness that it had built for most of the last 10 years. In the end most of the chatter left some feeling "women are just stupid" an obviously unintended but significantly more harmful outcome.

It's important that Dove (and Unilever) doesn't pretend that they're totally outside the issue they're taking on: female archetypes and self image.

content/uploads/2014/09/DoveVB1.jpg)

"Since Dove paved the way, I can name a lot of campaigns that have also followed the social experiment model beautifully," says Kim Getty, partner and CCO at Deutsch LA. She points to the recent American Greetings "World's Toughest Job" work or the Always "Run Like a Girl" effort," as examples. "Sometimes the truth is most compelling not because it's new news, but because it's something found within us. If a brand's greatest challenge is to connect with you, helping you connect with yourself may be their strongest

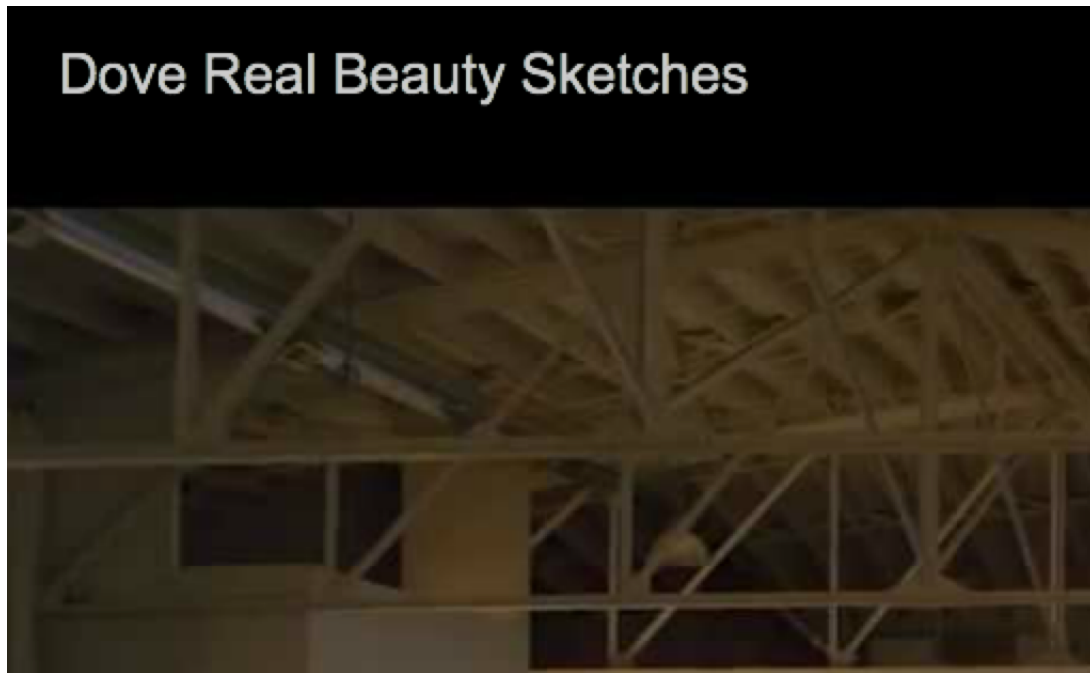
weapon.”

Britt Fero, executive vice-president, head of strategy at Publicis Seattle, feels brands are more conscious of how they portray women and who they choose as “models,” yet she isn’t convinced the “Campaign for Real Beauty” has dramatically changed the way brands market to women. Changing social norms constructed and reinforced over decades isn’t easy. “And the truth is, women still do have perception issues and until those feelings really start to change, sadly, we’ll still gravitate toward skinny models who look great in everything. I just had a baby and as much as I’d like to believe I’d buy some new clothes off a picture of someone else who still had some baby weight, instead, I bought a pair of jeans from a catalogue off a woman I’m hoping I can look like in the next four months... sad, but true..

David Soberman, professor of marketing and Canadian national chair of strategic marketing at the Rotman School of Management, believes the reason the “Campaign for Real Beauty” still stands out is because so few brands are doing it. “If you open a Vogue magazine, I don’t think you’re going to see that much change in the models,” he says. “Models don’t really have figures that one would typically see walking down the street, they aren’t average figures, they’re kind of unusual and I don’t think that has changed much.”

Kestin, who now runs the creative leadership consultancy Swim, draws parallels between the “Campaign for Real Beauty” and work from competing personal care brand Pantene. On the heels of a 2013 video called “Labels” that generated more than 46 million views online, The Proctor & Gamble-owned hair care brand recently launched a 60-second television commercial that urges women to stop apologizing and encourages them to “be strong and shine.” But talk is cheap, and Kestin says those kinds of messages ring hollow if the brand doesn’t back it up in more substantive ways. “Putting real-looking women who are normal in their advertising isn’t enough for me,” she says. For Dove, there was the “Self Esteem Project” (workshops, activities, guides, and videos all aimed at building girls’ self-esteem), for example. Pantene seems to have borrowed a page from this playbook, creating the Shine Strong Fund to “educate and enable women to overcome bias and/or societal expectations so they may reach their full potential, as well as celebrate the many strong women in the world who exemplify the essence of Shine Strong,” according to a P&G release. In the U.S. the Fund launched with a collaboration with the American Association of University Women on several resources including college grants and professional training

programs. While Pantene says it's "committed to helping women across the globe," no mention of the Fund is made during the video, which has attracted over 13.5 million views on its YouTube channel since June 18 and little can be found on the brand's website.



Based on the numbers, it makes sense that others would try to follow the Dove lead. Changing, or at least attempting to change women's perceptions of themselves and how they define beauty, is a delicate balancing act for consumer packaged goods giants and one that Dove has always been keenly aware of. "We're in a business, there's no question about that," says MacLeod. "But from day one I've always believed that if we did the right thing people would want to get behind what we're doing and show their support." And the right thing, as it turns out, seems to have been good for business.

(<http://www.marketingmag.ca/wp->



that we already knew—we probably judge ourselves a little too harshly. But seeing this proven out on a mass scale, in such an honest and nonjudgemental way, challenged my thinking: Why do we do that to ourselves? Because really, we're all pretty rad.



Johanna Blakley, PhD
**MANAGING DIRECTOR &
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THE NORMAN LEAR CENTER
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“Evolution” didn’t make me cry. The “Real Beauty Sketches” did. I think most women watching that video realize that they would likely do the same thing. They would allow their self-consciousness about how they differ from artificial ideals of beauty to warp their view of themselves.



Lance Martin
PARTNER + ECD AT UNION:

They showed that something as simple as a bar of soap can start a cultural conversation about women and beauty. Many brands have tried to emulate that same magic, but not to the same success.

content/uploads/2014/09/DoveVB2.jpg)

The year after the campaign launched, Unilever saw a significant sales

spike which leveled off, but according to Euromonitor, Dove global market share has increased 0.2% between 2004 and 2013. In Canada, Dove had a 2.1% share in 2013 compared to 1.9% when the campaign launched.

But after 10 years, is the “Campaign for Real Beauty” still fabulous or in need of a facelift?

The campaign started with the simple yet strong piece of creative “Tick Box” and has grown more complicated and become more convoluted with each execution. Instead of gently whispering into the ears of its consumers and allowing them to draw their own conclusions, Dove seems to be shouting its message in a way that’s more marketing than it is motivating.

“Tick Box” and the made-in-Toronto monster hit “Evolution” both did a good job of starting a different conversation about what beauty means, says Fero. “Some of the later stuff seems to rehash old conversations rather than take on or provoke new ones.”

“Patches,” a four-minute video from Ogilvy & Mather Brazil that launched in April 2014, is one of the more criticized executions to date. It has been called everything from “patronizing” to “not credible.”

As part of an experiment, Dove invited seven women to wear a custom-made “RB-X beauty patch” for two weeks that would help them feel more beautiful.

The participants kept a video diary of their progress and said they started to feel a boost in their self-esteem. But at the end of the experiment, it was revealed that the patch they had been wearing was a placebo.

“The issue that I have is that it required women to be victims in order to make the narrative work, and I felt it completely betrayed the soul of the original campaign,” says brand strategy consultant Bruce Philp.

Fero believes recent executions, including “Patches,” have lost their centre and feel as if the brand is looking for shock value content versus authentic conversation starters.

“By even having a patch solution for making you feel better about how you look says we need tools (whether a patch, or cellulite cream or thinning lotion or whatever)—which goes against the authenticity of the original conversation: ‘You’re beautiful without any of that,’” she says.

“Ogilvy and Unilever are the victims of having set a very high bar in terms of standout and cleverness,” says the well-known advertising consultant and former BBH chair Cindy Gallop. “A world-famous legacy campaign brings all sorts of issues with it including enormous pressure to outdo yourselves every time with each campaign, which I suspect is what led to the strained ‘Beauty Patch’ instalment, which almost felt like self-parody.”

When asked about the criticism surrounding this effort, MacLeod says, “We always listen to what people are saying. We take criticism very seriously, but lots of people really liked ‘Patches.’” Love it or hate it, people tuned in to watch it. “Patches” generated over 100 million views.

Keeping a long-running campaign fresh and focused is no easy feat, which begs the question, where does the brand go from here?

Though MacLeod is mum on what’s next for the “Campaign for Real Beauty”, in what appears to be a back-to-basics move, the brand recently launched a search for 50 “real” Canadian women of all ages to be part of the next creative execution that will be revealed later this fall. Promotional materials for the casting call featured women of varying ages and races standing together in white under garments.

Kestin, who hasn’t worked on the brand since leaving Ogilvy & Mather in 2011, says she wishes the campaign would continue to evolve in a way that respects women, though she’s not sure this means using “real women forever.”

“I think it needs to be real content and real meaning and real useful and real supportive of women, and it really needs to meet women eye to eye on a level place.”

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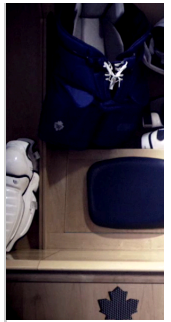
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