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Better ROI From YouTube Video Than Super Bowl Spot

Dove's Viral Hit 'Evolution' Is a Real Beauty

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Published: October 29, 2006

CINCINNATI (AdAge.com) -- Think dove's "campaign for Real Beauty" generated a ton of buzz for relatively little expense? You haven't seen anything yet.



Unilever's Dove brand has generated more response from its YouTube 'Evolution' spot than from its Super Bowl commercial. | **ALSO:** Comment on this review in the 'Your Opinion' box below.

three times more than Dove's Super Bowl ad and resulting publicity last year, according to Alexa.com.

By those measures, "Evolution" is the biggest online-buzz generator in the U.S. personal-care and beauty industries, topping this year's effort from Omnicom Group's Tribal DDB on behalf of the Philips Norelco Bodygroom shaver. And that's before the campaign began rolling out to 10 additional countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America last week.

Blog buzz

Traffic spike

With not a penny of paid media and in less than a month, "Dove Evolution," a 75-second viral film created by Ogilvy & Mather, Toronto, for the Unilever brand has reaped more than 1.7 million views on YouTube and has gotten significant play on TV talk shows "Ellen" and "The View" as well as on "Entertainment Tonight." It's also brought the biggest-ever traffic spike to CampaignForRealBeauty.com,

"Dove Evolution" also trounced another October darling of the blogosphere -- would-be investment banker Aleksey Vayner's self-promotional video -- for mentions on Nielsen BuzzMetrics' BlogPulse. And it ranked among the top 15 blog-linked videos last week on Technorati -- the only one, aside from a presentation by Apple's Steven Jobs, from a nonpolitician.

Unilever credits the success to a major PR blitz from independent Edelman, New York, around "Evolution," a fast-motion look at the myriad cosmetic and photo-retouching efforts that transform a woman into a billboard beauty model. The tagline: "No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted."

While Dove has gotten major PR play from past iterations of the 2-year-old campaign, it's always come in the wake of paid ads. Those included a 2005 outdoor campaign showing zaftig women in their underwear and the 45-second Super Bowl ad depicting girls' doubts about their looks. The latter prompted an entire "Oprah Winfrey" show.

Broad TV pickup

Even that, however, has been swamped by "Evolution," which in the past two weeks has garnered segments on ABC's "The View," "Ellen," CNN, "Entertainment Tonight" and even Fox's "Geraldo."

Unilever had already found that buzz can beat the direct impact of paid media. Todd Tillemans, VP-North American skin care, said while the Super Bowl ad generated about 90 million impressions, pre- and post-game publicity produced another 400 million, even though the ad only aired that one time on regular TV. (It has since run on in-store networks at Wal-Mart and Sam's Club.)

"Evolution" and the broader Dove campaign are among the strongest examples to date of Unilever's movement to develop "ideas that penetrate pop culture," said Lisa Klauser, VP-marketing shared services.

"Because we're out to influence pop culture," she said, "you see our brands taking very distinctive points of view. ... Dove has taken a stand that real beauty comes in all sizes, shapes and colors, that real beauty can be very stunning, and that there are a lot of beauty myths out there that perpetuate low self-esteem."

Dove Self-Esteem Fund

The overwhelming buzz is nice, but the ostensible purpose of "Dove Evolution" was to raise awareness of and donations for the Dove Self-Esteem Fund, a program that helps develop workshops for girls and boys on issues surrounding beauty perceptions, said Mr. Tillemans. The fund's goal is to reach a million girls through such programs.

"This is a great example of where we're not using the old playbook where we do a lot of TV advertising," he said. He believes the strong consumer insight behind "Campaign for Real Beauty" gave the effort "viral legs" and that the particular message was "more powerful because it came from an objective source" in the form of the TV news and

entertainment programs.'

Mr. Tillemans is convinced the emotional response the "Campaign for Real Beauty" has evoked from women has substantially strengthened brand loyalty, noting that two-thirds of brand sales now come from people buying more than one product, up from one-third three years ago.

"If you stood only for function, people would assess the brand based only on one category," he said. While cross-marketing, new-product performance and other tactical appeals have helped build that number too, he said, "I'm convinced the real driver of it is that the brand has increased awareness of this mantra, this mission."

It hasn't hurt sales, either. Dove has gained share in the past year in four of its five major categories: personal wash (body wash and bar soap), hair care, deodorant and hand-and-body lotion.

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