

Unilever understands that it must keep the brand fresh, relevant, and cool in order to stay current with its fickle young audience. As a result, the company launches a new fragrance every year and refreshes its online and advertising communications constantly, realizing that new young males enter and exit the target market each year. Axe's success in personal marketing has lifted the brand to become the leader in what many had thought was the mature deodorant category.

On the other side of the personal marketing spectrum, Unilever's Dove brand speaks to women with a different tone and message. In 2003, Dove shifted away from its historical advertising, which touted the brand's benefit of one-quarter moisturizing cream, and launched the "Real Beauty" campaign. "Real Beauty" celebrated "real" women and spoke personally to the target market about the notion that beauty comes in all shapes, sizes, ages, and colors. The campaign arose from research revealing that only 4 percent of women worldwide think they are beautiful.

The first phase of the "Real Beauty" campaign featured nontraditional female models and asked viewers to judge their looks online and decide whether they were "Wrinkled or Wonderful" or "Oversized or Outstanding." The personal questions shocked many but created such a large PR buzz that Dove continued the campaign. The second phase featured candid and confident images of curvy, full-bodied women. Again, the brand smashed stereotypes about what should appear in advertising and touched many women worldwide. The third phase, "Pro-Age," featured older, nude women and asked questions like, "Does beauty have an age limit?" Immediately, the company heard positive feedback from its older consumers. Dove also started a Self-Esteem Fund, aimed at helping women feel better about their looks.

In addition, Dove released a series of short Dove Films, one of which, *Evolution*, won both a Cyber and a film Grand Prix at the International Advertising Festival in Cannes in 2007. The film shows a rapid-motion view of

an ordinary-looking woman transformed by makeup artists, hairdressers, lighting, and digital retouching to end up looking like a billboard supermodel. The end tagline is: "No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted." The film became an instant viral hit.

Dove followed up with *Onslaught*, a short film that showed a fresh-faced young girl being bombarded with images of sexy, half-dressed women and promises of products to make her look "smaller," "softer," "firmer," and "better." Dove's 2013 film called *Sketches* featured a police sketch artist who drew two pictures of the same woman. For one, the woman described herself to the sketch artist from behind a curtain, and for the other, a total stranger described her. The difference in language and descriptions revealed how women are often their harshest beauty critics. The ad ended with the tagline "You are more beautiful than you think." The *Sketches* film has become the most watched video advertisement of all time and had more than 175 million views in its first year alone.

Dove's latest effort to change the attitudes of women and promote positive self-esteem was called the Ad Makeover. The campaign appeared only on Facebook and gave women the power to replace negative ads (such as for plastic surgery or weight-loss products) on their friends' Facebook pages with positive messages from Dove like "Hello Beautiful" and "The Perfect Bum Is the One You Are Sitting On." Unilever in effect bought the ad space from Facebook for the positive ads to appear on the friend's site, effectively squeezing out the negative ads. During the first week the Ad Makeover app was launched, 171 million banners with negative messages were replaced.

Although the Axe and the Dove campaigns have both sparked much controversy and debate, they couldn't be more different. Yet both have effectively targeting their consumer base with personal marketing strategies and spot-on messages. In fact, in the 10 years that Dove has focused on changing women's attitudes and promoting positive self-esteem, sales have jumped from \$2.5 billion to \$4 billion. Axe is not only the most popular male grooming brand in the world, but also Unilever's best-selling brand.

Questions

1. What makes personal marketing work? Why are Dove and Axe so successful at it?
2. Can a company take personal marketing too far? Explain.
3. Is there a conflict of interests in the way Unilever markets to women and young men? Is it undoing all the good that might be done in the "Campaign for Real Beauty" by making women sex symbols in Axe ads? Discuss.

Sources: .Jack Neff, "Dove's 'Real Beauty' Pics Could Be Big Phonies," *Advertising Age*, May 7, 2008; Catherine Holahan, "Raising the Bar on Viral Web Ads," *BusinessWeek*, July 23, 2006; Randall Rothenberg, "Dove Effort Gives Packaged-Goods Marketers Lessons for the Future," *Advertising Age*, March 5, 2007; Laura Petrecca, "Amusing or Offensive, Axe Ads Show That Sexism Sells," *USA Today*, April 18, 2007; Kim Bhasin, "How Axe Became the Top-Selling Deodorant by Targeting Nerdy Losers," *Business Insider*, October 10, 2011; <https://blogs.monash.edu/presto/2013/04/07/dove-flies-high-with-social-media-ii/>; Jonathan Salem Baskin, "The Opportunity for Dove to Get Real with Its Branding," *Forbes*, March 7, 2013; Danielle Kurtzleben, "Unilever Faces Criticism for Real Beauty Ad Campaign," *U.S. News*, April 18, 2013; Jack Neff, "Campaign Has Won Lots of Awards, Sold Heap of Product. But Has It Changed Perceptions?" *Ad Age*, January 22, 2014; Dove, www.campaignforrealbeauty.com; www.unilever.com; Unilever 2013 Annual Report..