

VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS



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Taking Size 14 and 36DD Risks

Two new ads show some skin—but do they show any guts?

Just when the summer was passing by uneventfully, leave it to the ad industry to shove some T&A in our faces. I've got two recent examples I'd like to compare and contrast.

The first ad, an ad to promote Advertising Week, featured some prominent cleavage with the headline "Advertising. We all do it." The second is a campaign for Dove Firming Lotion featured some real women (not models) showing off their not-supermodel-firm bodies and being proud of them.

There's a bit of, ahem, naked honesty in both ads. The Advertising Week ad reminds us that everyone promotes his/herself in some way (the other ads in the campaign, while less overt, have the same takeaway message). And until the Amish look comes in vogue, women know dressing scantily will command the attention of men. Like George Costanza once said, "It's cleavage. I couldn't look away!" The Dove ads affirm that its product works for the benefit of so-called "real women" by using real women in an un-airbrushed form, as opposed to the models so prevalent in typical beauty product ads.

So are either of these campaigns likely to get in CA or win a One Show award?

Practically speaking, I know neither one seems likely to win—at least the way shows are judged these days. Now, the Dove campaign might win an "EFFIE" for its effectiveness but to creatives, EFFIEs are the bastard stepchild of awards shows.

But think about this:

Which campaign took more risks? Which one defied conventional wisdom? Which one resonated more with its target audience? Which campaign brought a new level of attention to its respective category?

The middle-aged-white-male-overgrown-frat-boy-ad-award-show judge mentality says the Advertising Week ads would be more worthy of a trophy. But even though they're funny, they seem tame in the world of advertising self-promotion efforts. Advertising people like to push the industry inside jokes pretty far, so there's essentially nothing too shocking about a little cleavage.

In contrast, Dove certainly has put itself, and the women promoting it, out there for the world to see. Backed by an all-out PR push, The Dove campaign has people talking. Not just ad people. News articles, columnists, bloggers, people on the street, everyone's got an opinion. The billboards have even been defaced in subway stations. Nothing's more successful than an ad campaign so provocative it's both loved and hated in mass quantities. Plus, it's an integrated campaign—with a significant web component as well as traditional media.

So why wouldn't it be worthy of a significant creative award? No catchy British-style witty headline? No Singaporean visual solution? Would an ad for something called 'Dove firming lotion' be better if all you showed was some freaky visual, like a porcupine with silky smooth skin?

All the creative directors who preach the importance of advertising that contains "simple human truths" ought to be applauding the Dove campaign. And anyone who babbles about the importance of an integrated, consumer-engaging, more than just ads, old-plus-new media campaign should be on board, too. Even if they'd never dream of conceiving these particular ads.

So little advertising actually commands anyone's attention anymore, yet Dove's campaign has been provocative—good and bad. Hallelujah. That's the kind of risk-taking we rarely see. Yet award show judges will avoid it—in much the same way they'd avoid the fat chicks near the pool at Loews Santa Monica.

Like I said before, don't go looking for either of these campaigns to end up in next year's award show books. But if you judge them with truly high standards, you should look beyond the surface.

Because it's not just women that come in all shapes, sizes and forms. In advertising, risk-taking does too.