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## Grooming Companies Court American Males

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NEW YORK (AP) - Everyone wants flawless skin, flat abs and a fab rear. But men don't always admit it.

So, companies that sell products promising to help guys lose weight, conceal bloat and enhance skin have to walk a fine line between men's vanity and masculinity. But how do you market moisturizer to the Marlboro Man?

Dove plays the theme song to the 1930s TV western "The Lone Ranger" and compares guys' skin with cowhide in commercials for its men's shower gel. Weight Watchers uses TV spots with trimmed-down singer Jennifer Hudson to market to women, but opts for average Joes talking about drinking beer and grilling meat in ads for its weight loss program for men. Dr Pepper is more overt in ads for its diet soda targeted toward men with the tagline: "It's not for women."

The ads come as guys of all ages are succumbing to growing pressure to suck in their guts and hide their blemishes. In one of the biggest signs that men are more image-conscious, the number of chemical peels, laser hair removal and other cosmetic procedures on men is up 45 percent since 2000, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

"Back in the day, guys cared more about working hard and providing than having a hairy chest or a beer belly," said Brian McCarthy, 32, a Philadelphian who works out regularly and uses hair pomade. "Guys worry more about their appearance than they used to."

Fashion and pop culture have a lot to do with the change. The ultra-slim silhouette and skinny jeans that hit the high-fashion world several years ago have infiltrated men's departments in mainstream stores like Banana Republic and Old Navy. And because of social media websites like Facebook and Twitter, men constantly are confronted with photos of fit male celebs like singer Justin Timberlake and actor Will Smith.

The U.S. economic downturn even plays a role. With unemployment around 9 percent, men looking for a job have to make sure their look is as polished as their resume. "The better you look, the more you're going to earn," said Deborah Mitchell, executive director for the Center for Brand and Product Management at the University of Wisconsin School of Business. "Men are increasingly thinking 'Wow, I

need to look good or look young."

That doesn't mean men want the whole world to know.

Dove officials had that in mind when they launched a line of shower gels for men. The brand, a unit of Unilever, had been synonymous with women since the 1950s. But when Dove rolled out the Men+Care line of lighter-scented shower gels, it used a more "manly" approach to marketing.

The "Manthem," which was launched during the Super Bowl in 2010, showed a man's journey through life from conception to age 30. In another ad, the theme music for "The Lone Ranger" plays as a deep male voice urges men to use Dove shower gel to moisturize their "man hide," which it says dries out like cowhide. Then, the voiceover implores men to not be bashful: "Be comfortable in your own skin."

Rob Candelino, Unilever's marketing director for personal wash in the U.S., declined to give sales for the Men+Care line, but said the campaign has exceeded expectations.

Advertisement

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Before seeing ads for the Men+Care line, James Harris, 32, wouldn't dare use his girlfriend's Dove soap. But since seeing one of the ads during a Yankees baseball game in April, he has become a loyal user of the brand. "If it's for men, I'll use it," says the student who lives in Birmingham, Ala. "If it's for women, I won't."

Weight Watchers found that men respond better to real men - rather than women or celebs - in ads for its weight loss program. In April, it launched its first national campaign targeting men, using ordinary fellas talking about its online "cheat sheets" that give tips on the healthiest ways to enjoy beer and grilled meats.

"Losing weight clicked for me when I realized that Weight Watchers online was for guys too. It's not all rainbows and lollipops," one man says in the ads. Another recalls his friends teasing him about being on the program: "I go, 'Really? I look a lot better than you right now.'"

During the first five weeks of the campaign, the percentage of men using Weight Watchers online rose from about 8 percent to 15 percent of all users. The company plans a new campaign early next year.

Cheryl Callan, chief marketing officer at Weight Watchers, said you have to market to men and women differently. For example, she says "men will not use the word 'diet.'"

Many men also won't use the word 'girdle.' So, Spanx, which sells girdle-like products to slim physiques, made some changes when it launched its men's line last year. To market its "compression" shirt, which is designed to make a man's chest look firmer, the company tweaked its packaging and website. Both feature a macho, superhero-like character named Blake to convey the idea that men can "do anything" and feel "powerful" while wearing Spanx.

"Men's psyches are different than women's," says Laurie Ann Goldman, Spanx CEO. "Men want to feel powerful and strong. Women want to feel smart and choice-ful."

As for whether the name is a deterrent for men? Sales of Spanx for Men are about 40 percent better than the company expected, Goldman said, although she declined to give figures. "We found if you could take a couple of inches off a man's waist and tighten his torso, he would be fine calling it Spanx," she says.

But sometimes marketing to men winds up irking the opposite sex.

After research showed that men think drinking diet soda is "girly," Dr Pepper Snapple Group went out of its way to exclude women in marketing for its Dr Pepper Ten 10-calorie soda aimed at men. Ads for the "It's not for women" campaign, which was rolled out earlier this month, show men in a fake action movie drinking Dr Pepper Ten. There's also a "men only" Facebook page that features a game that allows guys to take target practice at lipstick and high heels. If you're listed as female on Facebook, you can't play.

Officials say the campaign has been well received, but an online petition to stop what critics say is "sexist" marketing lists more than 1,600 signatures.

Despite the controversy, Leslie Vesper, Dr Pepper's brand manager, says: "The vast majority of our consumers get the joke."

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