

# HELLO GIRLS.

*Eva Herzigova's breasts hoisted by Wonderbra. A hotpant-wearing rollerblader for Bodyform... Are these really the best examples of ads targeted at females? Belinda Archer and Jordan McGarry find out what really works for women*

It's the Super Bowl - that US bastion of supreme maleness. All blokey beer ads, knob jokes and pumping testosterone, right? Wrong. This year, the mega-American football head-to-head, dubbed the biggest TV sporting event on the planet, went all girlie and got in touch with its feminine side. Among the regular, more predictable ads for pizza, razors and fast cars were, gasp, ads which recognised that maybe, just maybe, some of the viewers were actually, no, really, women.

Unilever ran spots from its widely acclaimed Dove Real Beauty campaign, the one that celebrates 'real' (i.e. non-anorexic) women, Estée Lauder's Aveda sampled some of its new products at events surrounding the final in Detroit on 5 February and even Anheuser-Busch went on record as saying it planned to "take female beer drinkers into account" while selecting spots this year. That's big of the company. How nice. But what took it so long? Around half the 89 million viewers of the Super Bowl are known to be women - and that's a hell of a lot of consumers. Not surprisingly, US pressure group the Marketing to Moms Coalition found that 80 per cent of female Super Bowl fans "felt advertisers hadn't targeted them in the past". So why not? It's not just in the US, of course. Globally, there are companies and >

"IF AN AD IS funny it makes me think that the product understands me because it can make me laugh."

"If an ad is clever it changes how I feel about the product; I respect them for making a clever ad."

"When you laugh you feel like you have a more intimate connection to the brand and connect in a special way."

"Spending money is serious enough; I like to laugh while spending it."

Quotes from respondents to Finding the H Spot, the 2005 JWT report on women and humour in advertising (see right), in which it recommended that advertisers are missing a trick by not creating ads that make women, rather than just men, laugh.



**“And then he started putting his hand up my skirt—you know, the Jaeger one with the pleats...”**

—Overheard conversation between two young women on a London bus



"I AM ALWAYS nervous about working on the assumption that only women can write ads for women - just as I don't think only men can write for men. Let's remember that the author of one of the greatest novels about the psychology of women, Madame Bovary, was a man. I think it works better to keep equality and remove restrictions - even if they are just perceptual. Where I think we sometimes see a greater issue with teams is in life stage and experience - so many young creative teams find it difficult to relate to people who are not as young or single as they are, i.e. not like them.

But women do have a different take on life from men. Different things can make them laugh - whether it is the complete insanity of trying to run a family, pander to a husband and leave it all behind at work or just the continual search for the perfect pair of shoes or handbag that men will never understand. The guirkiness of real life makes women laugh far more than men. Female comedians definitely use relationships and men far more in their material than their male counterparts - but then we have never been afraid to talk openly about those two subjects, unlike men!"

Tamara Ingram CEO,  
Grey Group UK.

Female creatives Eight out of 30.



*"The Women's Aid Red Rose ad which ran on Valentine's Day was extremely powerful in that it took an evocative symbol on an evocative day and used it instead to dramatically highlight the issue of domestic violence to women. I think Valentine's Day is a significant day for women and the work reflected that - strong insight coupled with strong execution"*

Tamara Ingram

"ADVERTISING should be entertaining and surprising, no matter who the audience is. The audience should be given more credit and there should be less stereotyping. I find lots of ads aimed at women are overtly patronising.

Conservative attitudes still prevail, though, hopefully, that is changing. My favourite ad at the moment is Honda's Impossible Dream. I'm not sure it is aimed at women but it certainly touches me emotionally more than anything I've seen in a while.

I loved the Harvey Nichols sale campaign from last year. Also our Scope Eskimo (Rubbing Noses) ad is a personal favourite. Aimed at women who care about having fresh breath and social confidence, it just makes you smile.

Men probably like jokes about bodily functions more than women do. Women appreciate a little more subtlety, more emotion. When we connect with a woman on an emotional level it might translate into something she gets, because it speaks to her life."

Sarah Barclay Creative director,  
Saatchi & Saatchi New York.

Female creatives 40 per cent.

commercials that either forget about women altogether or, perhaps worse, woefully mistarget them and promulgate chronically outdated feminine stereotypes. Who can forget the excruciating white hotpants-clad rollerblader celebrating her period in the "Oo, oo oo oo oo, Bodyform-for-yoo" TV spot? Rollerblading? I ask you. And the more recent sanpro howler, in which a teacher mistakes a prettily wrapped-up tampon for a sweet. Puhleeze, it's the 21st century for chrissakes.

So why do so many advertisers get women wrong? Are we really that tricky? Is it because too many creatives are still male? Do women, in fact, really need different creative approaches from men at all? Jonathan Mildenhall, now group strategy director of Mother London, but former managing director of TBWA, creator of some strong, award-winning women-oriented campaigns such as Wonderbra, says: "Women's advertising is not attitudinal at all. Compared with advertising to men and youth, it is very superficial, showing the target audience in totally stereotypical situations and roles.

And yet women influence as much as 75 per cent of all purchases so they are a massively important target audience."

Mildenhall believes it is paranoia that makes agencies get their female-targeted advertising wrong. Women, it seems, are a sensitive subject.

"There was the whole issue of sexism in the 60s, then the feminism of the 70s and the empowerment of women in the 80s. This has meant that there has always been a creative reaction to what's going on with women socially and a paranoia across all advertising agencies that they will get the communication wrong. There is so much nervousness that agencies always play it safe, thereby getting it more wrong than if they had tried to be a bit brave," he observes.

Humour is another major, male-defined area of advertising where women seem to be overlooked. JWT has done some interesting research into humour in advertising with a report called Finding the H Spot. This looks at why so many funny ads seem to be aimed at men rather than women.

**"THE THINGS** that work for women are the same things that work when addressing any audience. We need to understand the target's mindset and how it intersects - or could intersect - with the product or service being advertised. What someone appreciates in advertising depends on the individual, I don't think it breaks along gender lines. Most people appreciate smart, insightful, witty advertising. Male or female."

Joyce King Thomas  
Creative director, McCann Erickson  
New York.

Female creatives More than a third (36 out of 109). And a third of the group creative directors are also women (10 out of 30).

*"Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty and Nike's much-talked-about campaign for women have made a big noise as they have done the unthinkable; putting forward women bigger than size 4 and shattering conventions held sacred for so many decades. Neither effort goes all the way to warts and all — I don't think we're anywhere close to seeing truly average people in advertising. But what fantastic movement in the right direction. The debate and big conversations that have been fostered by this work are really encouraging"*

Nancy Vonk

**"WOMEN AREN'T** so very different from men when it comes to effective communication. Approach them with a message that's relevant and deliver it in an interesting package and they'll respond. Don't talk down to them; don't stereotype. Assume they have a brain. Women hate being approached as if they're idiots. They don't like being stereotyped and they don't like the message they're supposed to look like freakin' Jessica Simpson.

Women may respond a little more to an emotional appeal than men. Again, no rules here. I've seen actual men shed actual tears over an ad. Women may be especially grateful for work that is intelligent and thoughtful. With the Dove work, there was a massive outpouring of thanks for women being portrayed realistically. Anyone that pushes back against the unattainable feminine ideals that make 99 per cent of women feel bad about themselves will score points, I'm betting. Women as goddesses is a long, tired trend that has to end. I think women are at a tipping point. They're getting close to being mad as hell and not taking it any more.

The work I like the least can be found in spades in any women's magazine - one impossibly gorgeous face after another staring out of the pages for various beauty products, all identical, none with a compelling idea. I hate that these ads make women and girls feel inadequate. I have a 12-year-old daughter who is so typical, comparing herself unhappily to the ideal shoved at her every day. It makes me sick. I hope the Dove and Nike work represents the beginning of a shift towards sanity."

Nancy Vonk Co-creative director, Ogilvy & Mather Toronto.

Female creatives About half.



Given the power of humour in advertising, it argues, shouldn't advertisers be trying to make more women laugh along with their brands?

"Humour is not a cute add-on or optional extra: it's a key factor in success," says the report. "Ninety five per cent of Cannes advertising winners use humour, while research specialist Millward Brown holds global data on more than 20,000 ads, tested on consumers in 29 countries, and the results show that ads with humour consistently engage consumers' attention more, are rated as more enjoyable and are remembered more vividly."

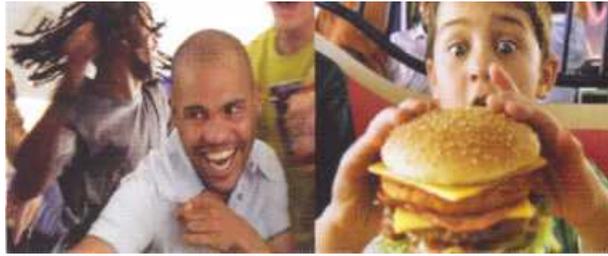
So why are 'funny' spots more often than not like the John Smith's ads, i.e. very male-oriented, with a fat Northern bloke drinking a pint of beer making rude or stupid gags? The agency spoke to women around the world and found (hoorah) that, yes, they do indeed have a sense of humour - but that it is quite different from men's.

"The typical male approach to humour tends to involve set-piece jokes that build up to a climactic punchline resolution, often with a butt or victim >

"WHEN MEN overwhelmingly out-consume a product over women (as they do with beer), they will be considered the main target. Generally, women don't have much influence over that purchase, so beer has become the domain of male-centric advertising. Cars are trickier. Yes, women make up half the consumer base. Yes, women have lots of influence over the purchase. So why do we seem excluded from car advertising? There is a common belief in the industry that if a car becomes known as a 'chick car', men won't buy it. Often, even women will stop buying it. Men won't be seen driving a 'chick car' and somehow, if only women drive it, the machine itself loses credibility. (That's when women stop buying it.) The new Beetle suffered from this. The more 'female friendly' the design, the more car makers will attempt to make its image masculine. The Mini is a good example. That may be the reason, but it doesn't mean there isn't a way to circumvent the whole problem. Saturn started to when they launched. They seem to have gone back to the tried and true boring stuff. The landscape is ripe for a new solution."

Lorraine Tao and Elspeth Lynn  
Partners and Co-creative directors,  
Zig Toronto.

Female creatives About a third.



WE DID A famous campaign for Wimpy (left) with the Burger for Men. The TV ad showed a guy taking his young son out for a huge burger to reward him for dropping his towel on the floor. The rest of the men in the Wimpy jump up and cheer his entry into 'manhood' while all the women look on in horror.

Most South African women have a good sense of humour, and loved the spot - although a few radical female groups condemned the ad, saying that we were encouraging men to be slobs and women to pick up after them. Our retort is that Morris Jones & Co is a female-owned agency, and we would never deliberately do something to offend women. It was a piece of fun and worked wonders for sales of the burger."

Angel Morris Creative director,  
Morris Jones & Co Johannesburg.  
Female creatives 49 per cent.

*MasterCard has spoken to women from the outset. It just has a sensibility about spending that women have related to. This is borne out in testing again and again. L'Oréal (also from my agency) has also done work that speaks to women about beauty and self-worth. Nike women's work has been great for years. Starting with the amazing If You Let Me Play Sports commercial. That is definitely the high bar"*

Joyce King Thomas



of the joke," says Diana Coulson, co-author of the report and European strategic planning director based at JWT Paris. "But women, as a rule, don't tell jokes and their humour isn't about 'laughing at'. The typical female approach is conversational and spontaneous, about 'laughing with'. Rather than telling off-the-shelf gags that involve stock characters and situations (blondes, lawyers, changing light bulbs etc), they tend to tell funny stories about real life, showing the funny side of the mundane."

So advertisers keen to engage women might bear this in mind, recommends JWT. They might also try to remember that there are very much areas of comedy that women, well, just don't find funny at all, such as physical, slapstick humour, cruel humour or 'toilet gags' - you know, the stuff that can have the average male helplessly doubled up in delight. Perhaps cruel humour, which pokes fun at 'victims', doesn't work because women have heard too many blonde jokes, mother-in-law jokes, PMS jokes, nagging wife jokes etc and thus "tend to be empathetic with people in general who may end up being the butt of someone else's joke", the report suggests.

And yet as one female respondent to the JWT survey said, reinforcing the Millward Brown research: "If an ad is funny, it makes me think that the product can understand me because it can make me laugh. When I laugh I feel like I have a more intimate connection to the brand and I view the company or product better." It's not rocket science, really. Some observers believe that the fact there are still so few female creatives - around only 20 to 30 per cent of the average creative department - could be contributing to the surfeit of misguided, mistargeted women's campaigns. While the issue does need addressing, others suggest this excuse is not good enough, however. Male creatives should be able to 'do' an ad for women just as any self-respecting female creative should be able to pull off a beer ad for blokes. As Vicky Wiggins, deputy head of planning at Saatchi & Saatchi London, points out: "The advertising industry is not a male domain. Although the number of female creatives remains low, much of the other staffing is filled by women. The creatives are actually at the end of a long strategic process, which many

## "FEMALE CREATIVES ARE

better at writing ads aimed at women than men. Insights are the one thing that work for anyone, male or female. However, being a woman there is the added advantage of self-experience and insight. Women have a different sense of humour from men, at least a majority of women have a slightly conservative sense of humour compared to men. But there are a handful of women with the same raw sense of humour as men.

In India, the biggest success has been Lowe's Surf Excel Puddle Wars commercial. It is aimed at women and mothers. It does not show women at all but it has been a runaway success story. Ninety nine per cent of all sanpro ads here are seriously bad. In all of them, every woman only wants to run or play badminton during her period for some reason."

Priti Nair Group creative director,  
Lowe Mumbai.

Female creatives 40 per cent.



*"In India the biggest success has been Lowe's Surf Excel Puddle Wars commercial. It is aimed at women and mothers. It does not show women at all but it has been a runaway success story"*

Priti Nair

*"I loved the Harvey Nichols sale campaign from last year. Scope Eskimo (Rubbing Noses) ad is a personal favourite. aimed at women who care about having fresh breath and social confidence. It just makes you smile"*

Sarah Barclay



**"THE POST-POST-feminist** is a growing breed, especially in the emerging markets. These women are rediscovering their sense of self-worth and are fighting to be recognised as equals in male-dominated societies. There are products that work towards boosting their self-image and want to accompany them on this voyage of self-discovery. The best way to communicate with her is to constantly have your finger on her pulse. Find out what her motivations and visions are and then build bridges connecting her with your brand promise.

While there are product categories that are targeted at both men and women, there are still some, like fem care and beauty care, that need to specifically address women - at least until unisex beauty products are created!

It is definitely time to start removing the gender bias in other categories. Women don't just produce babies and hot home-cooked meals. They buy cars, take home loans, run businesses and even run countries. But rarely is there a female protagonist in advertising for these traditionally 'male' categories."

Kumuda Rao Regional creative director,  
Leo Burnett India.

Female creatives About 40 per cent.

women will have had a responsibility for. So the opportunity for the industry to get it wrong starts well before it falls into the creatives' hands."

Susan Treacy, group creative director of Fallen in Minneapolis, believes the problem lies in the fact that companies just don't understand the target market properly. "They think of women as a segment, not as their sisters, wives, roommates or themselves for that matter. Misconceptions of women may come from the creatives, but it's just as likely to come from the senior agency people approving the work as well as senior clients who tend to be older and male," she says. This also leads to the dependence on female stereotypes: from Overstretched Mum to Sex Kitten or Kick-Ass Businesswoman.

"The plethora of female ad stereotypes take us back to the 'safety zone' that creative directors, account directors and clients impose on female work.

They fear offending a female target. They don't trust their instincts with a female target. They don't think what their wives or sisters would think is funny or interesting - they think of women as a mysterious segment that

needs to be talked to with delicacy and care," adds Treacy.

So what can be done? Despite what some say, boosting the number of female creatives could only help the process of targeting women better and communicating more effectively with what is, after all, half the population (we're talking a whole gender here, not left-handed C2DE vegetarians resident in West Hartlepool). Also being a bit bolder creatively and breaking free from cliched images will pay massive dividends, as well as creating funny ads that are funny in a female way, not in a fart, toilet, throwing-up-after-too-much-lager way.

As Mildenhall concludes: "There is editorial content, like Sex and the City, which is totally relevant to women. Yet, when you cut to the advertising break, it is way behind. Advertising needs to credibly target women because the current cliches and stereotypes are meaning that they are turning off quicker than men. If we don't get it right, and unless advertisers start having a proper conversation with them, their messages will be ignored."

Mmmm, not bad - for a man. 🗣️

**AS THE ADVERTISING** community tries to get its head around how to get branding through to consumers who don't have to watch commercials any more, a gang of girls have snuck up on everyone with a bright and brilliant answer. US Glamour magazine's Reel Moments short film series is the result of a competition that invited readers to submit their own true stories – the best five of which were selected for production by a committee of leading Hollywood women. The films were brought to the screen by all-female writer/director teams comprising industry heavyweights including Gwyneth Paltrow, who co-wrote and co-directed with filmmaker Mary Wigmore; Jenny Bicks, writer and executive producer of *Sex and the City*, and director and producer (and rock-star wife) Trudie Styler. The series, produced by Moxie Pictures, was paid for by sponsorship from brands including Nokia and Elizabeth Arden. Distributed online and on DVD with US Glamour's January 2006 issue, the films have scored huge points with the target audience, deftly communicating a gentle message for the sponsors without coming across as heavily branded.

"This wasn't a project about product placement," says Moxie's Francesca Silvestri. "It was more about finding the DNA of the brand, and finding an affinity between that, the filmmakers and the stories. Nokia wanted to do something that was very comedic and somewhat edgy; and Elizabeth Arden wanted to talk about women in the workplace and sort of empower them. I think that is an interesting shift that we're starting to see, where it's more of a brand association."

As a result, the films don't feel like 'advertainment' and so have been accepted into film festivals around the world, including Sundance and The Berlin Film Festival, in their own right. They have also launched the careers of several new female directors, an all too rare breed, says Silvestri. "When you look at the percentage of female directors it's so small it's unbelievable. If this can help in some way that's great."

Silvestri calls the project the ultimate win-win situation: "Glamour was very happy, the underwriting sponsors were very happy.



*"Nokia wanted to do something that was very comedic and somewhat edgy, and Elizabeth Arden wanted to talk about women in the workplace and sort of empower them. I think that is an interesting shift that we're starting to see, where it's more of a brand association"*



## women at work



The writers, directors, actors and crew were very pleased to be doing good work and having a charity benefit. It was one of those projects where instantly we just all thought 'let's do this again!'

In fact, Glamour Reel Moments mark two is currently under way. Readers have already sent in their stories and the directing teams are soon to be announced. There's even talk of expanding the series internationally, with the UK likely to be the next territory to get involved. 

See shots 94 DVD to view one of the films.

Fonte: Shots, n. 94, p. 22-28, May 2006.