

## A campaign that erases a layer of euphemisms

*Advertising spots for tampon brands historically have been among the most euphemistic on television, featuring women riding horses along the beach or twirling in fields of flowers, while voice-overs assure that the products will instill "confidence" and "freshness."*

But the ads have grown less oblique in recent years, and a new campaign for Tampax uses elements that were once unheard-of in ads for tampons and sanitary napkins: candor and even humor.

In a series of television spots by Leo Burnett Worldwide for Tampax Pearl, a Procter & Gamble brand, an actress depicting Mother Nature approaches women and gives them a present wrapped in red, representing the onset of their menstrual cycle.

In one ad, she presents the red box to a woman sunning on a beach in a white bikini. "Mother Nature here, bringing Kate her monthly gift: Her period," says the actress, who is in her 40s and is smartly dressed in a Jacqueline Onassis-style green suit, her pinched smile suggesting a sinister edge.

Looking at the skimpy bikini, she says, "Good luck wearing that with backup," an expression for using a sanitary napkin as reinforcement for a tampon. But Kate reaches into her beach bag, pulls out a box of Tampax Pearl tampons, and winks triumphantly at the camera. The voice-over tag line: "Outsmart Mother Nature — with Tampax."

Tampax has been running several ads in the campaign since July, and this month it will introduce another, in which Mother Nature interrupts a woman's steamy dream with the red gift, as well as an online-only video where the actress thrusts the package at unsuspecting women on the street, an unscripted video using nonactors who subsequently signed releases.

Becky Swanson, a creative director from the Chicago-based Leo Burnett USA on the Tampax account, said that the campaign was intent on avoiding oft-parodied clichés.

"There are no walks on the beach, no riding a white horse or sitting on a white couch, and no conversations between a mother and a daughter about 'that not-so-clean feeling,' " Ms. Swanson said.

The Mother Nature character was developed to be a "worthy opponent who is all-powerful and very much in control, more of a mother-in-law figure," Ms. Swanson said.

While the target audience is vast, she said, "the idea of having this worthy opponent really resonates with younger girls, because when someone tries to tell them how to lead their life or what they can or cannot do, they want to outsmart that person."

Using the word "period" in commercials is something Tampax has been doing only in recent years, but Ms. Swanson says that newer spots drop the word as women become more familiar with the campaign, making it unnecessary to spell out what the red gift represents. Procter & Gamble's most prominent use was in the "Have a happy period" campaign for the company's Always sanitary napkins, ads that began in 2005 and continue today.

Patricia Perez-Ayala, vice president of Procter & Gamble's feminine care division, says that while most women alternate between tampons and sanitary napkins depending on the stage of their menstrual cycles, the company's research indicates that they generally have a preference, or "mind-set."

"A pad mind-set is much more embracing the period and is much more accepting because it's part of being a woman," Ms. Perez-Ayala said. Women who have favored tampons have a different attitude.

"A tampon mind-set is like, 'Period — what period? I don't even want to talk about it,' " Ms. Perez-Ayala said.

The Always and Tampax campaigns speak to those contrasting views — the idea of Mother Nature's being an opponent would most likely be anathema to a devoted pad user, as would the notion of a "happy period" for those who favor tampons.

According to a report from Mintel, a market research firm, the United States tampon market was worth \$610 million in 2008, a drop of nearly 1 percent from the previous year. The report also said growth in the market had been sluggish since 2005 because baby boomers were reaching menopause and were no longer using menstrual and birth control products. Tampax brands lead the tampon category, with 49 percent of the market, followed by Playtex brands (25 percent), Kotex (10 percent) and O.B. (6 percent), according to Mintel.

Kotex, made by Kimberly-Clark, declined a request for an interview about its marketing efforts, as did representatives from O.B. (made by Johnson & Johnson) and Playtex (a division of Energizer Holdings Inc.).

While tampons have been advertised in print since Tampax first sold them commercially in the 1930s, they were not advertised on television until 1977, and ads skirted the word "period" until 2000, when Kotex unveiled a campaign with the theme "Kotex fits. Period."

Kotex caused a stir in Australia last year when it ran a series of humorous ads for its Kotex U brand that struck some as being in bad taste, and others as hilarious. The ads, by the Sydney agency Brandshop, feature a woman and a joking reference to slang for female genitalia, and ended with the tag line, "You've only got one. So for the ultimate care down there, make it U."

The ads, which attracted about 300,000 views on YouTube, also drew more than 185 complaints to Australia's Advertising Standards Bureau.

While the feminine care industry prides itself on empowering women and giving them confidence, critics fault it for doing just the opposite.

Elizabeth Arveda Kissling, author of the book "Capitalizing on the Curse: The Business of Menstruation" and a professor of media studies and women's studies at Eastern Washington University, echoes other scholars who find fault with the term "feminine hygiene," a term popular with industry watchers and on signs in drugstore aisles.

"It suggests that femaleness itself is a little dirty and you have to clean it up, and it goes back to ancient taboos about menstruation being a pollution," Ms. Kissling said by telephone.

As for advertisements getting more candid, Ms. Kissling wrote in her book, which predates Tampax's Mother Nature campaign, that while "often they give the appearance of breaking menstrual taboos by speaking openly about the management of menstruation," commercials still were highly euphemistic, never even showing the products in bathrooms, where "they are usually kept and used."

Still, Ms. Kissling recently screened some ads for the new Tampax campaign for her women's studies class, and she said her students had been impressed.

"My students thought the ads were hilarious," she said. "There's still a powerful taboo about talking about menstruation, and being able to laugh about it is a big change."

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