

For a men's body lotion, a rugged messenger

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In a new television spot for Vaseline Men body and face lotion, Michael Strahan, the former New York Giants defensive end who stars on the Fox series "Brothers," demonstrates a 15-minute workout in a hotel room, including push-ups and lateral jumps over rolled-up towels. Afterward, Mr. Strahan rubs lotion on his Popeye forearm.

"Skin's another part of my body I keep strong with Vaseline Men fast-absorbing lotion," he says. Finally, a voiceover suggests that the lotion, like the workout, is expeditious: "It takes just 15 seconds for stronger, more resilient skin."

In the new campaign — a collaboration between ESPN and the New York office of Bartle Bogle Hagarty — and a new Web site, StrongerSkin.com, Vaseline, a Unilever brand, explores new territory for men's grooming.

While new categories like men's body spray, shower gel and facial scrubs have surged in the last decade, major brands like Axe, Old Spice and Gillette have not introduced below-the-neck moisturizers.

Some upscale brands, like Clinique and Jack Black, make men's lotions, but they are sold mostly at specialty stores like Sephora.

Before introducing Vaseline Men in 2008, the brand, whose research indicated that only 17 percent of men used body lotion at least once a week (in contrast to 44 percent of women), assessed why men abstain.

One barrier is that lotion has what's known in toiletry marketing parlance as "poor sensories" for men.

"The major reason men don't use lotion is they think lotions feel sticky or tacky, and that they take a long time to put on and don't absorb quickly," said Srini Sripada, marketing director for skin products at Unilever.

To those accustomed to richer lotions, Vaseline Men, which is formulated to absorb quickly, may feel as if it is lacking moisturizers, although that may appeal to lotion newbies.

But the bigger barrier to using body lotion for men may be less tactile than psychological.

"Using too many products makes you a girl," begins a feature about facial moisturizers in the November issue of Maxim, which advocates their use but cautions against toiletry overload, telling readers that if their medicine cabinet holds more beauty products than their girlfriends' "(and/or you have a Sephora charge card), it's time to pull back a bit, Betty."

According to a recent report by Packaged Facts, a market research company, the United States men's grooming market — including the largest segment, shaving products — rose from \$3.8 billion in 2004 to a projected \$5.6 billion in 2009, an increase of 46 percent. It projects growth of another 56 percent, to \$8.7 billion, by 2014.

"Shaving is the gateway" for men concerning toiletries, but the "use of a body lotion probably is at the far end of the spectrum from the traditional manly activity of shaving," said Timothy Dowd, a senior analyst at Packaged Facts.

"I think the stereotype is that, for a man, putting lotion all over his body is a more effeminate activity than putting lotion on his face," Mr. Dowd said. "That's not a real fancy interpretation — it's just an empirical observation."

But, Mr. Dowd added, "even though men are resistant to some products like body lotion, they're less resistant than they were 10 years ago."

One way Madison Avenue telegraphs machismo is by hiring athletes as spokesmen — as Arthur Murray Dance Studio and the weight-loss company Nutrisystem did with the retired N.F.L. stars Emmitt Smith and Dan Marino, respectively.

Mr. Sripada, of Unilever, says that while sports figures like Mr. Strahan help remove barriers for the masculinity conscious, equally important is the "sports analogy" of equating a 15-minute workout for strengthening physique with a 15-second application of lotion for strengthening skin.

While most lotions are marketed as one or the other, Vaseline Men — deeming itself for "body and face" — mirrors other so-called multifunctionals in men's care, like shower gels made by Old Spice and Axe that double as shampoos.

As men get more accustomed to certain products, the functions become more pinpointed, but with lotion, men are "in the early stages of conversion," Mr. Sripada said.

In the 52 weeks that ended Oct. 4, Vaseline Men generated revenue of \$11.3 million, a 1.2 percent share of the overall \$970 million body lotion category, according to Information Resources, a market research firm whose data does not include information on Wal-Mart.

Nivea for Men, a brand that makes a range of shaving and other products, also introduced a body lotion in 2008. Unlike Vaseline Men, which tends to be stocked with unisex lotions, Nivea for Men was stocked in the men's aisle, according to Nicolas Maurer, vice president of marketing for Beiersdorf North America, a unit of the German company Beiersdorf.

It was an experiment that did not go particularly well, Mr. Maurer acknowledged in an interview. Sales in the last 52 weeks totaled only \$210,000, less than 2 percent of sales of Vaseline Men, according to Information Resources.

Now the company is considering how to restage the offering, which it introduced quietly without advertising, by shifting it to the lotion aisle, he said.

Like Vaseline Men, the Nivea product aims to have a more masculine scent and to absorb quickly.

"For women, to have a certain feeling of silkiness on their skin is appealing, but for guys what's important is that the product has a masculine dimension, which in this case means it absorbs quickly and has the right fragrance," Mr. Maurer said.

"Men want a product that delivers against the uncomfortable feeling of dry skin without adding to the sense that they're applying a beauty product."

New York Times, New York, Nov. 3rd 2009, Advertising, online.