

Detergent Can Be So Much More

P&G's new ads strive to "stake out the emotional high ground"



Laundry is, after all, just laundry. Except when it's not. And Procter & Gamble Co. recently realized that Tide, its segment-dominating cash cow, despite adding three share points in the past year for a total 42% of the category, was in jeopardy of slipping into mere commodity status. That's when consumers buy on price and habit, which can spell the end of brand growth.

LAUNDRY BONDS

THE PROBLEM: Tide for the past four years had only advertised mundane stain-fighting messages. Such creative indifference hardly did justice to an iconic brand so cool that Kevin Roberts, CEO of Tide agency Saatchi & Saatchi, wrote in his book, *Lovemarks: The Future Beyond Brands*: "I saw Neil Young in a recording studio wearing a sleeveless T-shirt with a Tide logo, and it just screamed possibilities."

So, in an attempt to cultivate Tide's inner "lovemark," new ads now dismiss the notion that laundry detergent is a mere commodity. Instead, they reflect P&G's conviction that the "relationship" women—they're not bothering with men—have with their laundry goes well beyond cleaning grass-stained T-shirts.

Indeed, the effort is part of a companywide strategy to reestablish bonds between customers and all of its brands, no matter how mature or mundane (table, page 68). Lynne Boyles, P&G global vice-president for advertis-

BY ROBERT BERNER

ASK MOST WOMEN about their "relationship" with laundry and detergent, and what's likely to come back is disbelief at the question. Then what follows may be a spew of complaints about spouses and teenagers who don't do their fair share of washing, and perhaps a lament about a favorite blouse ruined after going through the wrong cycle.

ing, says the company is on a mission to unearth and cultivate the deep connections people have with its products. "We are striving for that with all of our brands."

To find a new message for Tide, P&G tried a twist on the traditional focus group. Instead of gathering women in a room, Tide managers and strategists from Saatchi & Saatchi spent two weeks in the field talking to women in Kansas City, Mo., and Charlotte, N.C. They followed women as they shopped and ran errands and sat in on bull sessions "to hear them dish about their lives," says Wanda Pogue, a Saatchi brand strategist. To help other P&G and Saatchi officials experience the research, videos of the women were used to create scripts performed by actresses in a one-hour play titled *Pieces of Her*.

park. The message: Tide lets women focus on the important things. The new slogan says little about cleaning. Instead, "Tide knows fabric best" is meant to encompass the broader range of Tide products on the shelf today. "One of our rallying cries was to get out of the laundry basket and into her life," says Kevin Burke, P&G's fabric care marketing director.

BEYOND ABSORPTION

THERE'S ALSO MORE music and less talk. In one 30-second ad, Tide's odor-removal benefit is billed as "the difference between smelling like a mom and smelling like a woman" amid images of a mom with baby, and then as a wife cuddling with her husband, set to the song *Be My Baby*.

The Tide ads reflect the mandate of P&G marketing chief James Stengel that brands must speak to consumers eye-to-eye rather than relentlessly driving product benefits. Print ads for P&G's Always feminine pads, for example, have gone from serious messages about absorption to ads like one in which a pad is folded in the shape of a cell phone. "Put leaks on hold," says the ad. "Have a happy period. Always." Pampers ads emphasize the brand as an aid to child development, not just dryness.

Behind the strategy lies the cold truth that product benefits are quickly copied, whether it's

Changing Mere Brands to "Lovemarks"

Procter & Gamble aims to inspire meaningful relationships with even the most mundane products:

TIDE Ads convey that women can focus on other things in their lives because Tide is taking care of the laundry.

ALWAYS P&G is using design and wit to elevate the image of the sanitary napkin. One ad bends an Always into a chaise lounge. The copy: "If you're going to sit on it all day, it better be comfortable."

PAMPERS No longer pitched as just the most absorbent diaper, Pampers now is sold as helping the development of your baby.



Data: Procter & Gamble Co.

The P&G team concluded that it needed more than Marketing 101 ads, with side-by-side stain comparisons and a huge shot of a Tide bottle to support the stable of brand-line extensions it has launched in the past 18 months. The researchers tapped into how emotional women could be about clothing. For example, there was the joy a plus-size, divorced woman described when she got a whistle from her boyfriend while wearing her "foolproof (sexiest) outfit."

Out of this process flowed lighter ads. One TV commercial depicts a pregnant woman spilling ice cream on the last shirt that fits. Another shows a mother in white pants rushing from her office to day care and then with her daughter to a

cleaning power or diaper absorbency. So P&G is putting more capital into how a consumer feels toward a brand, a value harder to replicate. As the market leader, P&G's best course is to "stake out the emotional high ground," says Graham Woodall, executive creative director at ad agency JWT Worldwide.

Still, some critics wonder if P&G is taking the act of washing clothes too seriously. "Everybody wants to elevate their brand to this kind of more rarefied level, but at the end of the day detergent is detergent," warns Adam Hanft, chief executive of Hanft Unlimited, a brand consulting firm. With Tide's market-share heft, though, P&G has plenty of room to tinker with the formula.