

# Dove flies high on new route

The faces that represent the Rs 500 cr premium brand are of ordinary women

BYRAVEE IYER

The faces that represent Hindustan Unilever's (HUL) biggest premium soap brand are not familiar. For, they represent 11 ordinary women who won Dove's Real Women Face Test — a campaign that received over 4,500 entries.

Last month, the fast moving consumer goods major put all of them on billboards, newspapers and on television to endorse the Rs 500 crore brand in a high voltage advertisement campaign.

That's Dove's way of going off the beaten track in its communication strategy. Unlike other soap advertisements, the premium brand did not use the usual models or movie stars. Instead, it got real women who use the product to give testimonials of their experience with the brand.

For Dove's hair wash variant too, HUL initiated huge sampling in malls by setting up counters where consumers could get their hair washed and then photographed. These pictures were showcased in the Dove Gallery. As a result, testimonials were not just on TV, but also online through consumer-generated content and in print.

Gopal Vittal, Executive Director — home and personal care of HUL, says the process is two-pronged, comprising "conviction and proof". Thus, the first phase of the campaigns showed the performance of the product on the face, which was quickly followed up by testimonials from "real people".

Interestingly, HUL adopted an old commercial from its American counterpart and Ogilvy & Mather tweaked it for the Indian audience. A mandatory 360 degree campaign is on as well. What's more, it has even been running roadblocks across channels like Star and Zee, where it bought out all the commercial advertising time on an exclusive basis.

This at a time when all other companies have tightened their purse strings. "Investments have been stepped up for Dove given the high media elasticity. The brand has an enormous growth opportunity," adds Vittal.

Brand consultant Harish Bijoor of Harish Bijoor Consults isn't sure if such initiatives add volumes, but feels they certainly improve sentiments. Bijoor, however, says "Dove is a classic case of consistency especially in a country like India where people have come of age in terms of affluence. The soap's advertisements are very timely."

They surely are. Sales of the soap have been growing at over 40 per cent annually and the recently launched shampoo variant at 100 per cent. Dove is now almost a Rs 500 crore brand, with soaps accounting for around half of that figure. The rest comes from hair care, a category launched two years ago. On the market share front, Dove has a 3.5 per cent share in metros. In modern-format

stores, it leads with a share of 11.54 per cent.

The performance is creditable considering that at the time of its launch in India nearly 15 years back — when everything was priced low — HUL launched Dove that was double the price of any other premium brand. Pricing did put off customers initially and questions were raised about the soap's longevity.

"When we first brought this product to the market, the price difference was such that if a regular soap cost Rs 100, we were at Rs 700," says Vittal. But Dove has come out of the

**Sales of the soap have been growing at over 40% annually and the shampoo variant at 100%. In modern-format stores, the brand leads with a share of 11.5%**

initial scare — in style.

So what makes the brand tick? Typically, HUL uses an internal tracker called Living Standards Measure or LSM to gauge the performance of a product. LSM can range anywhere between one and 18 — a higher score shows a higher living standard. On that scale, India is a LSM 3 nation with 70 per cent of the

population in that range. A product like Dove needs the market to score six or above. And that's why HUL has been betting big on Dove. "For us, the metros and the top 30 cities are the most important, given the con-

sumer target for the brand," says Vittal. But that doesn't mean HUL is ignoring the rural markets, where it hopes to sell its Rs 3 sachet. "Going forward, rural will be important too," he adds.

Here's a pointer to why HUL thinks Dove has a great future. On the LSM scale of six and above, India's market is about 100 million strong and that number is far bigger than the population of some European countries. The skin cleansing category was more than Rs 7,700 crore in 2008, recording a growth of 11.8 per cent. Within this category, the premium price segment is leading the pack with a 15.3 per cent growth rate.

And unlike HUL's other soap brands like Liril, Lux and Lifebuoy, which have undergone a series of relaunches, Dove has remained constant. Though it has gone in for brand extensions such as shampoos and deodorants, the brand's core advertising proposition and premium positioning has remained the same. Consistency can indeed pay. Ask Dove's brand managers.

