
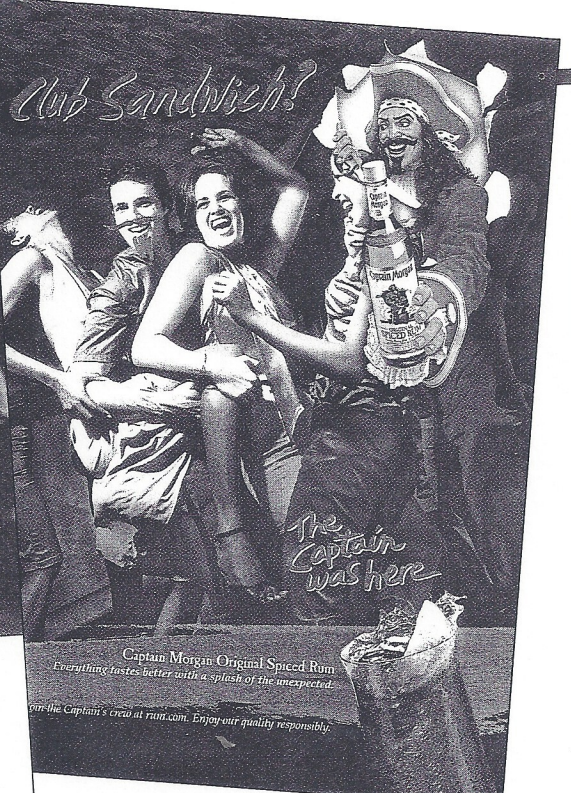


IN CANADA, THE AVERAGE PAY CHECK RARELY LASTS TWO WEEKS. IT'S MORE LIKE TWENTY SONGS.



Strong, smooth whisky from a country that requires it.

The Revelstoke Canadian Spiced Whisky, 40% alc./vol. and 80 proof, Imported from Canada by Philip Morris Inc., Charlotte, NC.



Club Sandwich?

The Captain was here

Captain Morgan Original Spiced Rum
Everything tastes better with a splash of the unexpected.

For the Captain's crew at rum.com. Enjoy our quality responsibly.

Down and dirty: A lap dancer teases in this Revelstoke effort; a double entendre is used in a Captain Morgan ad with the product as backdrop.

SPIRITED SEX

Alcohol ads ratchet up the sex to woo jaded consumers

By Hillary Chura

PITTED AGAINST DEEP-POCKETED COMPETITORS, small spirits players increasingly are looking to risqué advertising to get noticed. Even large alcohol marketers are using similar strategies to wow a public desensitized by "The Man Show," *Maxim* and prime-time TV that starts sexy and gets steamier as the night wears on.

Though scantily clad women have as much to do with selling spirits as they do with selling auto parts, they long have been used to hawk everything from perfume and shampoo to frozen dinners. For liquor and beer, the strategy has existed since before the St. Pauli Girl and Stroh's Swedish bikini team needed training bras.

Most observers, however, believe the trend is accelerating as American culture becomes more accepting of advertising content that once would have been unthinkable. "What you see in advertising is what you see on network TV. It's about the lowest

common denominator," said a longtime ad executive who has worked with alcoholic products. "[Lewdness] is the easiest thing in the world to do."

The consensus is that the downside is minimal because people offended by particular ads probably wouldn't buy the products they promote anyway. Consider Revelstoke, a seven-month-old spiced Canadian whisky that looks to make a splash in North America with a paltry \$1 million budget. One ad, set in a strip bar, shows a perky, barely obscured woman in the midst of a lap dance.

"The minute I looked at it, I could hear all the girls in my feminism class roaring. They'd flip out," said Jacqueline Craig, a 20-year-old junior at the all-women's Scripps College. "Then again, whisky is more of a guy's drink ... and that ad definitely targets that audience."

Sex seems more prevalent with new brands, dying products or ones with small budgets, but venerable and well-funded brands have their moments as well. Philip Morris Cos.' Miller Brewing Co. considered a spot that suggested a thirsty

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Actually, size does matter.

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Miller Beer

Hard liquor

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woman sweltering in the desert is cooled off by having something other than her legs shaved (Miller Genuine Draft, by WPP Group's J. Walter Thompson, Chicago). A Jim Beam Brands print ad shows buddies in a strip bar and bachelor party (Jim Beam bourbon, by WPP's Y&R Advertising, Chicago). An ad for Seagram Spirits & Wine Group's Captain Morgan is suggestive of a menage a trois, with a dancing man sandwiched between two women (Grey Global Group's Grey Worldwide, New York), while Skyy Spirits pulled from some publications a Skyy vodka ad that featured a sunbathing woman reclining on a diving board and gazing up into a man's crotch (Lambesis, Del Mar, Calif.)

Anheuser-Busch Cos., lauded for having some of the best beer ads in the business, has one ad asserting "actually, size does matter"; another ad, juxtaposed near shots of buxom women, ponders "they're fake—so what" for Tequila (by Dieste & Partners, Dallas).

Most advertisers cited would not comment for this article, but Dean Phillips, president of Revelstoke importer Phillips Beverage Co., contends his colleagues are taking a page from brewers who made swimsuits and stilettos standard marketing fare. "It is indeed the easy way and the effective way," he said. "It's hard to be in this business and not look at the success of beer advertisers and

argue that it doesn't work."

Mr. Phillips said the stripper ad was created for *Maxim* and would not run again because it did not reflect the brand equity. He said he'd received no complaints about the work—but did get about 75 requests for posters.

Dave Fitzgerald, president-CEO of Atlanta's Fitzgerald & Co., an Interpublic Group of Cos.' shop with experience on low-budget spirits brands, said there is a compelling reason alcoholic beverage



Dancing fools: Jim Beam bourbon.

ads must push the envelope. "You don't sell on taste. You've got to sell on image, so that puts extra pressure on the creative execution."

But, countered Kim Gandy, incoming president of the National Organization for Women, "Using a woman's naked body to sell products is not very creative."

Brian Gibbs, an assistant marketing professor at Vanderbilt University's Owen Graduate School, said 18- to 25-year-olds are so bombarded by media that only something extraordinary grabs their attention.

Indeed, Revelstoke's agency, Holmes & Lee, Toronto, felt the brand needed something to jump start it in a stodgy category, said President John Lee, who hastened

to add, "I don't want you to think all we do is trashy stuff." He said the current ads "set up a tonality in the presentation," noting that while advertising must make every nickel work for a brand, "that doesn't mean being over the top. People who do that find people only remember the ads and don't remember the product."

So does sex sell? Since its launch in select U.S. markets at the end of last year, Revelstoke has sold about 6,000 cases (compared with category leader Seagram's Crown Royal, which sold 2.5 million cases in 1999), according to industry publication *Impact*.

Frank Walters, research director at *Impact*, said it is impossible to measure whether licentious ads affect sales, but said he believes the industry has come a long way since the 1980s and Nude Beer, which featured models with scratch-off bikini tops on the labels.

But sex isn't the only thing used to gain attention. Several marketing executives maintain small-budget brands get more bang for their bucks with varied guerilla tactics—such as wild postings, on-premise work and promotions, such as Revelstoke's heat-activated urinals in bar men's rooms with sayings such as "man who pee on electric fence receive shocking news" and "never play leapfrog with a unicorn."

But it also can turn off consumers. "People who are going to go that course are running a great risk," said a veteran beer-marketing executive. "That's not where society is at."

Americans, however, have become more accustomed to promiscuity in the media, largely because they've been deadened to it, said Bruce Stern, professor of consumer behavior at Portland State University in Oregon. "The shock type stuff is becoming more commonplace. ... We are weaned on it," he said. "We're moving into an arena that we are becoming numb to things that absolutely would've offended us a few years ago." □