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The Erotic History of Advertising

THE BOOK

Author	Tom Reichert. Illustrations
Publisher	Prometheus Books
Published	2003
Format	Paperback, 6.5" x 9"
Pages	300
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> *...A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE ... [in this fantastic book] Dr. Reichert has covered almost all forms of advertising right from the posters of the 1850s to internet banners of today. The long journey through time is full of controversy, involves humungous amount of money and showcases some of the most beautiful women. In the end, all I can say is that it has been a wonderful experience reading this book. A most pleasurable one. I have learned more about myself through the products that I buy. We all are so gullible, the prime exploit of manufacturers and it is our appreciation of sex that makes is sell...*

Editor's recommendation — this book carries the editor's "must buy" recommendation.

The Erotic History of Advertising *by* Tom Reichert. Illustrations, Paperback, 6.5" x 9". Prometheus Books, 59 John Glenn Drive, Amherst, New York 14228-2197, USA. or . Publication Date:

May 2003. Category: Social Science & Current Events. 300 pages, ISBN-10: 1591020859. ISBN-13: 978-1591020851. Price $24.00

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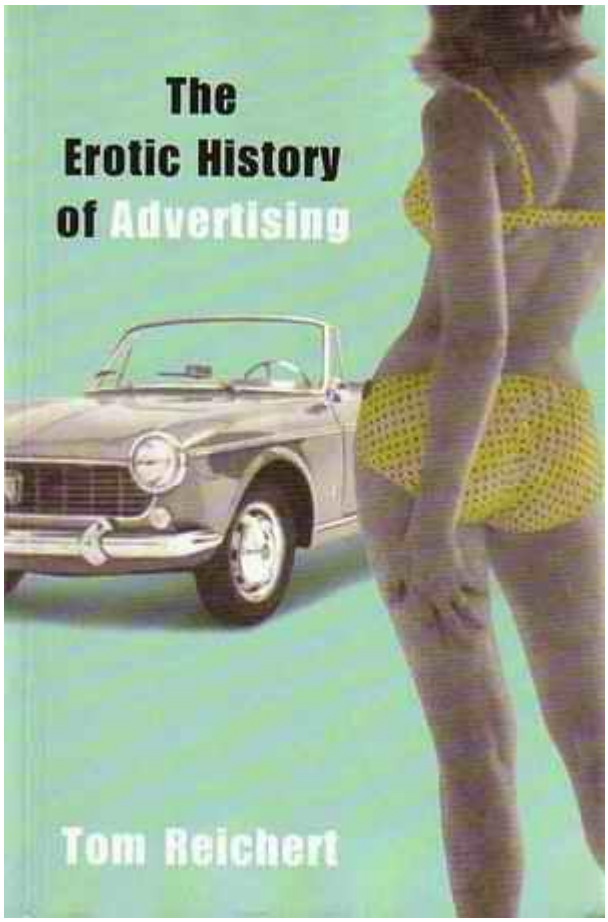

At first glance it looked like just another book on advertising. However the title caught my attention. It read "*The Erotic History Of Advertising*". I flipped through the pages just out of curiosity, and I knew that this is a must-read book. The famous ad of Fiat-auto adorns the cover of this book. Basically, it is a paperback with fine pages, extremely good quality of printing, completely indexed and ready to be read. Also, there are over 100 images that bring this book to life, features some of the best sex campaigns in the history of advertising.

This book is not just a work of literature, but a well researched treatise by Dr. Tom Reichert on how sex has been used in advertising over the years. It might be a book which defines fundamentals to an advertising person, but it is extremely enjoyable to read by anyone. The basic question is whether "Sex Sells?". This book gives you that answer. What we see as sexually explicit material in various media nowadays, we love to abhor; yet it motivates us to buy the very same product!

The great saga of sex in advertising starts far back in the 1850's where the nude female form was used to "sell" products ranging from corsets, tobacco to beverages. As the author describes it, this portrayal of nudity is more of a work of art; it makes the consumer feel chic and confident. Another revelation is that many companies on the brink of bankruptcy have become great success stories just by using sexual innuendos in their ads. Probably it appeals to the most basic of human instincts

and makes the person feel in control. Many more interesting conclusions came into perspective as read through this book, many were almost shocking.

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This book is divided into two sections titled: The Age of innocence: Early years (1850-1975) and Reaching Maturity? Contemporary campaigns (after 1975). This division is noteworthy as there has been a paradigm shift towards the more outrageous and bold expression of human sexuality in advertising in recent years. The author gives very prudent reasoning to explain this shift. The change is directly linked with the level of maturity of the society with regards to sexuality and the decrease in the taboo of sex. It seems bizarre and incredulous, but the ads showcase the attitudes of our society.

The author ventures deeper in to the human psyche, and there are some stark facts that emerge such as over 90% of ad campaigns use female nudity. Shocking as it might sound, but it appeals both to men and women. Men feel more confident and to the women the thought of achieving the same form of beauty creates appeal for the product.

Further, Dr. Reichert has covered almost all forms of advertising right from the posters of the 1850s to internet banners of today. The long journey through time is full of controversy, involves humungous amount of money and showcases some of the most beautiful women. In the end, all I can say is that it has been a wonderful experience reading this book. A most pleasurable one. I have learned more about myself through the products that I buy. We all are so gullible, the prime exploit of manufacturers and it is our appreciation of sex that makes is sell.

-Pranav Jain



-Pranav Jain
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Comments from Editor-in-Chief Dr. Anil Aggrawal and Excerpts from the book:

This highly informative and interesting book by Tom Reichert, Ph.D., an Advertising Professor at the University of Alabama, deserves to be read by all and sundry. The board of editors - after much deliberations - decided to run some excerpts from this book so readers can get some idea about the wonderful text and still more wonderful (and sometimes rare) pictures, the book contains. Here in chapter 8, Reichert is explaining how a company which sells clothes uses nudity in advertisements, to the extent that the models are often shown wearing no clothes at all! How in the world - Reichert surmises - can a company sell clothes, and that too successfully, by showing models who are

wearing absolutely nothing. Most of these ads are shown in magalogs (magazines which are also catalogues). The company in question is Abercrombie & Fitch. Here is what he has to say:

ABERCROMBIE & FITCH (pages 233-5)

Let's look at Abercrombie & Fitch in more detail. Employing a strategy of "cool" with its youthful casual clothing, and hyping it with nudity and a sexy "just between us boys" marketing approach, the company has successfully tapped the fickle fourteen- to thirty-year-old crowd in a short time. The company courts eighteen- to twenty-two-year-old college students with its controversial "magalog" featuring Bruce Weber shots of seminude and nude buff models. Time described the book as "frolicking models draped in nearly as much eroticism (hetero and homo) as they are in sweaters." Through assessing and shaping young people's tastes, and feeding it back to them with sensual lifestyle images, Abercrombie's success is nothing short of spectacular.

This is the cover of the 2002 Holiday issue of the *A&F Quarterly*. Readers must be at least 18 years old to buy or subscribe to the 350 - page "magalog." This figure appears on page 233 of this book (Click to enlarge)



View this book on Amazon

Abercrombie's CEO, Michael Jeffries, has taken his company, head¬quartered in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, from rags-and-debt to riches. Founded in 1892, Abercrombie & Fitch was traditionally an upper-crust sporting goods and apparel store frequented by the likes of Teddy Roosevelt and Ernest Hemingway. Fortune's Lauren Goldstein described it as a "high wasp travel emporium ... selling conservative men's wear." The once bankrupt company was languishing when it was bought by the Limited in 1988 for $47 million.

When Jeffries took over in 1993, Abercrombie was losing $6 million on sales of $85 million. In 2001 profits stand at $168 million on revenue of $1.35 billion, with a market value in excess of $2.5 billion. Paralleling its revenue increases, the company's mall-based retail stores have grown from 36 stores in 1993 to over 491 in 2002.

The transformation has been fast. Just a few years ago my father-in-law popped into an Abercrombie's expecting to find some stodgy sportswear. Immediately assaulted by blaring music and "a bunch of kids running around the place," he did an about-face, heading right back out the door. The "kids" were college-age students, an important Abercrombie target. According to Jeffries, the target market has radically switched from "70s to death" to the other end of the age spectrum,

teens and young adults ages eighteen to twenty-two. Clothing is described as upscale casual and includes sweaters, khakis, shirts, and what Newsweek called "a lot of rugged and military styles." Abercrombie's price point is positioned between its family members, The Gap and the more expensive Banana Republic.

These Wilke-Rodriguez ads gained attention in 1992 This figure appears on page 237 of this book (Click to enlarge)



Abercrombie uses aggressive marketing tactics to keep up with teen tastes. It hires fraternity and sorority kids to wear Abercrombie with the stricture that they "look cool and have fun." It positions good-looking models outside its doors to attract girls. "Cool, great-looking guys attract cool, great-looking girls, who attract ... Get it?" explained Jeffries. Time observed that "A & F shrewdly understands that teens want to belong, and has captured their dollars by making sure they want to belong to the beautiful, exclusive world that the Abercrombie image projects."

Regarding image, Abercrombie is to fashion what Maxim is to magazines. Both are extremely profitable, enjoying exponential sales increases, and both use skin to appeal to teens and young adults. Jeffries, with Sam Shahid and Bruce Weber, two fashion veterans who have created provocative images for Perry Ellis, Calvin Klein, and Banana Republic, are credited with Abercrombie's image. Shahid was creative director of Klein's in-house agency from 1981 to 1992. Not surprisingly, many of the models in Abercrombie ads could pass as younger brothers of Calvin Klein's Obsession models - statuesque, white, and muscular. Young women in the ads are slender and shapely. The signature shot is of shirtless models with pants pulled down below their hips. Many ads feature young men pulling up their shirts to reveal washboard stomachs and low-riding boxers, swimwear, or shorts.

Sinclair Intimacy Institute uses ads like these for selling their "Better Sex Video" series. Obviously the sales are high! This figure appears on page 338 of this book (Click to enlarge)



As previously mentioned, the cornerstone of Abercrombie's marketing is its magalog, the A&F Quarterly, a combination catalog/ magazine. According to Time, "Its quarterly 'magalog' has become a youth manual." Mailed to over 350,000 youths, the magalog boasts 350 pages (just 100 pages when it was introduced in 1997). A year's subscription is twelve dollars; individual issues are six dollars.

The Quarterly, meant to be humorous and fun, takes a decidedly sexual tone. Its images are chock-full of nude and seminude female and male models in lifestyle shots. Newsweek described it as "stuffed with photos by Weber. . . Everyone's frolicking about in Abercrombie garb or nothing at all." Titles are "XXX" and "The Pleasure Principle." Because the magalog is meant to parallel the "college experience," it contains articles about drinking games, scoring in your dorm room, and where to ski nude. Recently, it featured sex tips from porn star Jenna Jameson. Regarding the references to sex, Jeffries doesn't deny it. "It's within the context of friends, family and caring for one another. It's not promiscuous sex."

Other promotional efforts include limited advertising, in-store displays, and a catalog suitable for all ages. Abercrombie's advertising budget in 1998 was $1.6 million, small compared to tens of millions of dollars for competitors Polo and Tommy Hilfiger. Advertising is concentrated in print. Buys have included Rolling Stone, Vanity Fair, and Out. Many of the ads are shot in black-and-white which gives Abercrombie an upscale look.

Overall the book is a great read and full of interesting pictures such as these. The book shows us how adverstisers use our innate attraction to sex and erotica to sell their products. The reader is himself taken by surprise at his own gullibility. We are sure our readers would enjoy the book as much as we at the journal office did. A must read for all and sundry!

View this book on Amazon

Other reviews of *The Erotic History of Advertising*

Advertising Educatinoal Foundation

Journal of the History of Sexuality - Volume 13, Number 1, January 2004, pp. 120-121

The University of Alabama news

-Editor-in-Chief