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■ 'A STEP FORWARD'

In Dove ads, normal is the new beautiful

By JACK NEFF

UNILEVER'S DOVE BRAND this week embarks on a global integrated-marketing campaign that undermines the basic proposition of decades of beauty-care advertising by telling women—and young girls—they're beautiful just the way they are.

The "Campaign for Real Beauty" will include ads breaking in November magazines by WPP Group's Ogilvy & Mather, Chicago, and extensive public relations by independent Edelman, Chicago and New York. It formally kicks off with a media event in New York on Sept. 29.

A Dove spokeswoman declined to comment on specifics of the print campaign, other than to say it would differ from a well-publicized U.K. take on the campaign that broke this spring. Those print and outdoor ads, for a Dove firming body lotion not yet sold in the U.S., feature generously proportioned women recruited off the street rather than models.

Unilever launched the online portion of the effort last week through its "YourDove" e-mail newsletter. It includes a Web site, campaignforrealbeauty.com, with message boards where women can discuss beauty-related issues. In its U.S. online marketing efforts, which appear to foreshadow the print campaign, the Web site features a plus-size woman, older women and a heavily freckled woman, inviting visitors to vote on such questions as "oversized" or "outstanding?"

BRIGHT SPOT

Dove has been one of the prettier spots in a

dreary picture of late for Unilever, which last week announced it would broadly miss earnings forecasts for 2004 as sales of its leading brands decline (see story, Cover). But Dove's sales have grown at a double-digit clip for several years and now top \$3 billion globally.

Stacie Bright, marketing communications manager for Unilever in the U.S., sees no risk to Unilever's biggest beauty brand in a strategy that tells women to be happy looking just the way they are. Dove ads have long eschewed supermodels for women who resemble the moms and girls next door who buy its products. "This isn't a departure for the brand," Ms. Bright said. "It's a step forward."

'DEMOCRATIC' BEAUTY

Dove is going beyond marketing in the conventional sense toward social advocacy, with the campaign site proclaiming it "aims to change the status quo and offer in its place a broader, healthier, more democratic view of beauty." A Dove Fund for Self-Esteem, funded by the Unilever Foundation, is taking under its wings some existing programs from around the world, including "Uniquely Me!" a self-esteem program for U.S. Girl Scout troops, largely in economically disadvantaged communities. It is also endowing a Program for Aesthetics and Well-Being at Harvard to examine portrayal of beauty in popular culture and how it affects women.

Meanwhile, Slim-Fast, another Unilever brand, is aiming squarely at women who aren't



DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS: Dove's Web site features non-models and invites visitors to vote on what they see.

satisfied with their looks. In a counterpoint to the U.K. ads proudly featuring plus-size women, a Slim-Fast ad by Grey Worldwide, London, last summer played on British women's insecurity about how they look in bikinis alongside their French peers in the annual fight along the European beaches.

"Unilever is a really large company that owns a lot of brands," Ms. Bright said. "There are a lot of different types of people in the world, and I think that's how those campaigns live in the same company." ■