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5/11/2020

Brand Case Study



Aerie

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<https://www.ae.com/us/en/c/aerie/cat4840006>

Introduction:

For my brand case study assignment, I chose to study the brand Aerie. Aerie is a women's clothing brand focused around more intimate apparel. The retailer was established in 2006 and is sub-brand owned by the popular clothing retailer, American Eagle Outfitters. I picked this brand for their #AerieReal campaign. This marketing campaign was first launched in the spring of 2014 and has been on-going ever since. The brand stirred up the fashion industry by doing something that many/most clothing and lingerie brands never do: they left the photos of the models sporting their merchandise untouched and un-photoshopped. No smoothing out cellulite or covering imperfections or hiding tattoos. No heavy makeup or pretending. Just real pictures of real women of all shapes, sizes, and colors feeling happy and comfortable in their own skin. These ads pointed out in print that the pictures were not retouched and closed with taglines such as "The real you is sexy. #AerieReal".

The purpose/main goal behind this campaign was (and still is) to get girls and women to feel comfortable with their bodies and who they are; that they don't have to look like the perfectly airbrushed models that are used in a lot of today's advertising. Aerie wanted to reach out to all women of all ages, races, ethnicities, demographics, etc. and make them feel beautiful. These ads that they used for the #AerieReal campaign were posted all over the internet, social media, billboards, magazines, television, and more. Not only did it build loyal customers out of the people who were already familiar with and had previously made purchases from the brand, but it widened the audience to women who were so used to shopping from brands who try to make everything in their ads seem perfect. A lot of women saw that Aerie was pointing out the problem in society where women are pressured to be skinny and have no flaws. They appreciated that a brand was finally flipping the script and embracing flaws.

Justification:

When it comes to why the #AerieReal campaign was needed, there are multiple reasons. One that stands out is the obvious gap of realness and authenticity in the way women are depicted in a lot of today's advertising, especially in marketing for clothing and lingerie brands. When we think of women in advertisements and commercials, we mostly think of beautiful women with slim bodies, clear/smooth skin, done up or blown out hair, and lots of makeup. Women that are considered by many to be perfect; otherwise known as supermodels. One of the most popular brands in the world for women's lingerie and intimates is Victoria's Secret. Victoria's Secret is one of the countless women's clothing retailers that uses these perfect women/supermodels in their advertising. And no matter how beautiful these women are, they still are touched-up and photoshopped to have absolutely no "flaws". By flaws I mean things such as: stretch marks, birthmarks, moles, freckles, cellulite, scars, fat and more. These shouldn't be covered because they are all normal things for humans to have, and when people try to hide these in advertising it makes the people seeing these advertisements insecure about having them. It causes unhealthy body image issues to the young girls and women who feel like they need to look the same way; leading to things as serious as depression, anxiety, body dysmorphia, and eating disorders. Here are some statistics that show just how toxic the media and advertising world can be to women:

- Most models weigh an average of 23% less than a typical woman.
- Problems with eating disorders have increase over 400% since the year 1970.
- Only 5% of women in the US actually fit the current body type popularly portrayed in advertising today.

- Over 25% of girls surveyed felt that the media makes them feel pressure to have a perfectly shaped body.
- 69% of girls surveyed concurred that models found in magazines had a major influence on their concept of what a perfect body shape should look like.

Aerie saw these issues and took note. They wanted to make a change and create positive messages about self-love and empowerment of women; what the majority of other brands in the marketplace were missing. Aerie wanted to be more than just a place for consumers to shop for clothes at; they wanted to build strong consumer relations and constantly show their audience that they care about them, not just their money.

Going along with the concept of supermodels and the idea of perfection being the wrong approach, its important to focus on consumers being able to relate to a brand. People tend to gravitate towards things that remind them of themselves, or that they can relate to, or that they can picture in their own lives. Aerie saw that this was also missing in the marketplace of women's advertising for clothing and intimates, so they and took charge to be the brand that most/if not *all* women can relate to. They found it important to make all women and girls feel comfortable in their stores and buying their clothing; no matter what age, race, ethnicity, or body type they are.

Objectives:

Their were multiple main goals/objectives that Aerie wanted to come out of the #AerieReal campaign. Aerie's goal for awareness was to get the campaign out to its current consumers, while also broadening its audience. In completing this goal, Aerie did research to

find out what platforms they could use to best reach their target audience. After finding what platforms would best do the trick, they placed ads on these medias to get the information out.

Aerie's attitudinal objective was to get consumers to form some kind of emotional connection to their brand. They wanted their target audience to have good opinions and attitudes toward the brand. This was a big reason why they found it so important for consumers to be able to relate to their advertisements. This create a positive bond between the company and its audience. Aerie then did research to figure out how their target audience feels about different types of advertisements and what would be the best options to get their attention and connect with them.

Aerie's behavioral objective with the #AerieReal campaign was to study how its target audience interacts with different types of advertisements. When their audience comes across a specific type of advertisement; does it catch their attention enough to the point where they interact with it, or do they just scroll passed or ignore it? The answers to these questions will provide Aerie's marketing team with more information about what types of advertisements will have the most positive impacts for the success of their brand. It also helped them to figure out how to best lead their target consumers to their online store sites.

Key Messages:

A big goal of the #AerieReal campaign was to create a strong brand voice. The voice Aerie wanted to create was one of self-love, body positivity, and inclusivity of all. In order to create this brand voice, Aerie needed to create messages in their advertising that were crafted specifically to let people know that these are the things that this brand is about; this is what they

stand for/what they believe in. Aerie was very successful in the way that they created their messages.

In spreading the message that Aerie stands for self-love, the brand put made sure to include messages of empowerment in all of their marketing. They don't just show off their merchandise and leave a logo. Aerie works hard to try and encourage their audience to be their best selves. This includes to feel confident and not self-doubt. Aerie did, and continues to do this, by reaching out to their audience through their advertisements with motivational words, positivity, and even encouraging their consumers to share their own messages, stories, and positive thoughts with the brand. The brand is well known for using their consumer's photos and feedback in their marketing, which is something that its loyal customers find empowering in a way; it makes them feel important and shows that they matter to the company. These messages from consumers are often posted on the brand's website or social medias.

The biggest message that Aerie wanted to include in their brand voice was body positivity. They wanted to show all women that all bodies are beautiful the way they are and that they should not feel pressured to look like the supermodels in most advertising today. The #AerieReal campaign would teach women and girls that its okay and normal to be different; that standing out is a good thing, and to embrace your imperfections. These messages were conveyed with the tactic of zero photoshopping on Aerie's models in their advertisements. The brand wanted to keep everything as real as possible to show its audience that all women are beautiful, and everyone has imperfections. Not allowing any touch-ups or faking in photos on their models was the perfect way to make the message of body positivity part of their brand voice.

Aerie also thought it was very important to make all women feel welcomed to shop their brand. They wanted inclusivity to be a big part of their brand voice, so the made sure to convey

that in through the #AerieReal campaign. Not only do they use not use and re-touching/photoshopping to their models' bodies, but they make sure to include women of all races, ages, ethnicities, backgrounds, body types, etc. in their advertising. Aerie has recently added to their #AerieReal campaign with a concept of "AerieReal Role Models". This is what the brand has started using to refer to the women who endorse them because they truly are more than just models. Aerie uses women of all job fields and representatives of many different communities to model their apparel. Women such as actresses, activists, members of the LGBTQ community, women with disabilities, and so many more. Aerie knows that including such diverse groups of women in their campaign is important to get the message out that they invite all women to be apart of their audience and to empower all women.

Target Personas:

When it comes to target personas, Aerie is a bit different than a lot of other brands. They are women's clothing and intimates retailer, so they obviously target women. However, going back to Aerie's idea of inclusivity, they welcome and invite *all* women to shop their brand. This is their primary public. Women of all ages (around 14 years old and up), body types, races, ethnicities, etc. This is Aerie's wide target audience. Also, because Aerie's clothing lines are typically very simple and can work in many versatile ways, that also interests women of all demographics. They offer many basic pieces, at good quality and reasonable prices, that all women need in their closets.

Aside from these basic necessity pieces, Aerie offers a wide range of workout clothing. Things such as women's yoga pants, sports bras, and other pieces made specifically for the gym. Therefore, Aerie's secondary public would be women who are into being active and working out.

Platforms & Tactics:

In order for Aerie to reach all of its goals for the #AerieReal campaign, it was extremely important to figure out which platforms and tactics to use to best reach and connect with their target audience. This way, they can place their ads where all of their target personas will see them. They used lots of research and testing to find what forms of media (digital and traditional) would be the most successful for the brand's marketing.

A huge majority of Aerie's marketing is through social media. Social media allows Aerie to be connected with not only its target audience, but its loyal customers as well. If consumers are big fans of the brand, they will most likely follow them on social media. This way, Aerie can post photos of their clothing daily and look to comments and direct messages after posting for feedback that comes directly from consumers. Aerie also places ads on different social medias for target personas that may not follow the brand's account, but still spend lots of time on the medias. Aerie's biggest social media platforms are Facebook (1.9 million likes), and Instagram (1.3 million followers).

Aerie has also gained a tremendous amount of publicity from earned or "free media". This is because of their decision to trademark the "#AerieReal". Because the brand added the "#", it gave consumers and the brand's main audience something to participate in and spread the message of Aerie's brand voice amongst each other. Aerie encourages consumers who are active on social media to post untouched photos of themselves sporting the brand's apparel and use the hashtag. Aerie's social media marketing team often interacts with these posts by and sometimes even uses them as features on the company's own social media accounts. The hashtag creates lots of WOM buzz and is a great marketing tactic. Aerie takes the power of the hashtag even

further and pledges to make donations to charities for every time the hashtag #AerieReal is used. This is a statement from the brand's website:

“For EVERY unretouched photo you share with #AerieREAL @Aerie, we'll donate \$1 to NEDA, a non-profit that supports those affected by eating disorders.”

Another platform that Aerie uses to connect with consumers is their #AerieReal Life website. A whole web page dedicated to building brand voice and creating a place for their audience to feel good. The site includes blogposts about many different things including style tips, self care, advice, and more. Along with fun DIY projects, a calendar of upcoming events that the company holds for its customers, and a place to share encouraging messages of positivity. The site doesn't push the brand's products, but focuses more on building good relationships with consumers.

Results:

The #AerieReal campaign that began in 2014 has worked so well for the brand that they still continue to use the campaign today in 2020. In the first year of the campaign's run, Aerie's profit growth went from 9% to 20%. Showing that the target audience connected to the new untouched advertisements. Fast forward 2018 sales increased 29% from the previous year and later jumped another 20% in 2019. Proving that the success of the campaign was not wearing off, but only growing stronger. Aerie's revenues increased from around \$310 million in 2015 to almost \$650 million in 2018 at an average annual rate of 27%. With all of this, Aerie has earned the current spot of the second e-commerce lingerie retailer in the country according to the NPD group.

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