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WHAT P&G GOT RIGHT —AND WRONG— IN ITS DIVERSITY PUSH: An early focus paid off, but P&G's top marketer says it is behind on its diversity hiring goals

Jack Neff, Ad Age, June 30, 2020

After the killing of George Floyd spawned global racial unrest last month, many marketers were scrambling to find or create relevant content or messages. It wasn't easy. Pandemic restrictions on production made new work difficult.

But not for Procter & Gamble Co., largely because it had focused on diversity and inclusion programs and messaging for years. The company's experiences, including its missteps, offer lessons for other marketers trying to overhaul their internal processes and external communications amid pressure from consumers who are demanding that brands do better.

P&G already had videos on racial bias including "The Talk" and "The Look" ready to run on TV, which it did as the single sponsor of a CBS News special in early June. The company had two new short films from its two-year-old Queen Collective partnership with Queen Latifah and Tribeca Studios on racial bias issues ready to run on BET, alongside two prior films launched the year before on Hulu. P&G already had a Take On Race initiative launched a year earlier, giving it somewhere to direct people to send donations, get information or otherwise take stands when it launched another ad, "The Choice," asking white people to go beyond just not being racist.

"The Talk" shows how Black parents discussed racism with their children over several decades. Courtesy Procter & Gamble

While some other marketers pulled back on Pride Month efforts to focus on racial injustice, P&G continued on both tracks, including the third installment in a branded documentary series from CNN's Great Big Story about portrayal of LGBTQ+ people in advertising. And it had another ad, "The Pause," about the difficulty LGBTQ+ people have introducing themselves or their partners, ready to go. P&G also has launched a trilogy of ads about the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has had on Blacks, Hispanics and women, created during the pandemic via agency relationships or other partnerships launched at least a year ago.

All these efforts came out within the past two months.

Having so much content ready at the right time helps prove P&G was involved with racial justice well before it became the topic du jour, says Wil Shelton, CEO of Wil Power Integrated Marketing in Los Angeles. "What you want to know is, did Black lives matter [to them] before Black Lives Matter?" says Shelton, a Black man whose multicultural agency focuses on the beauty and grooming industries. "You want to know if it's authentic. And I do believe it, because I've looked at what they've done."

"The Choice" asks white people to use their power to put an end to racism. Courtesy Procter & Gamble

P&G also has been working on diversity and inclusion marketing long enough to fix things in subsequent iterations that didn't work right the first time. When people complained about fathers being invisible in "The Talk," P&G followed that video with "The Look," focused on a Black man.

"You're going to make mistakes sometimes when you step out," Shelton says. "I've been consulting with a lot of big brands and agencies, and they're so afraid to miss the mark that they don't do anything at all," which he says is a bigger mistake.

Trial and error has meant evolving from just seeking diverse casting to making sure portrayals are accurate, says P&G Chief Brand Officer Marc Pritchard. For example, when Old Spice had Black men Isaiah Mustafa and Terry Crews representing the brand starting 10 years ago, "It was funny to some, but not to Black men, who found much of the work to be sophomoric 'fraternity' humor," Pritchard said last year at the Association of National Advertisers Multicultural Conference. Black people wanted to see Black men represented accurately as sophisticated and smooth, he says. So the brand hired its first Black female director, Millicent Shelton, who created a "Men Have Skin Too" campaign starring Deon Cole, which Pritchard believes accomplished the goal, helping grow the brand's sales and share with Black consumers and the general market.

Mustafa's return to Old Spice earlier this year came alongside a son, played by Keith Powers, working in a professional job as a sophisticated counterweight to Mustafa's over-the-top character.

Pritchard also credits a diverse marketing team on Old Spice inside P&G. Still, he acknowledges the company is behind its goals for representation of people of color at various levels inside the company—numbers it doesn't disclose publicly— though he says P&G is much closer to where it wants to be on gender representation. Pritchard last week said P&G has a goal of 40 percent representation by people of color within its employee ranks.

And for all brands now, P&G is reviewing marketing to ensure not only diverse casting but also "accurate representation," he says.

In "The Pause," members of the LGBTQ+ community discuss their fears about acceptance. Courtesy Procter & Gamble

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"I was in a meeting the other day and I made it very clear that I never want to see another advertising storyboard that doesn't reflect the population we serve," Pritchard said during a recent media call introducing the latest Queen Collective films. "And then I looked around the room and said, 'I never want to see another meeting that doesn't reflect the population that we

serve," he said, adding that "the advertising industry is very much like the film industry—it's too white."

P&G's agencies are making progress, and the company has made progress in North America on gender and ethnic diversity in its production crews, he says, but is far from where it wants to be. "Look, none of us is perfect. We're not even close," Pritchard says. "We're better than we were, but we're not where we want to be. We own that. And we understand that. What we're going to do is double down a little further."