



# Dove Campaign For Real Beauty

**3 Social Media Lessons from Advertising Age's  
Best Campaign of the 21st Century**



The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty was — and continues to be — revolutionary. The campaign has been around in various iterations since 2004, touching women in dozens of countries. No wonder Advertising Age just named it the Best Campaign of the 21st Century.

“Groundbreaking, brave, bold, insightful, transparent and authentic.”

“Many ad campaigns over the years have sold soap. Fewer have tried to change societal notions about beauty. Even fewer have tried to do both. Dove’s ‘Campaign for Real Beauty’ is the campaign that did it.”

While the campaign is known for its print and video, the heart and soul of the campaign — and the very essence of it — is centered in social media. Unilever is the company whose Dove brand group had the courage to turn the cosmetics industry upside down. Ogilvy is the advertising agency behind the brilliant creative concept and ads, but you might not know that LiveWorld developed and managed the original online community/social media aspect of the campaign from 2004 to 2006 — which Ogilvy’s head of creative for Dove said was the fulcrum of the entire campaign that became a movement.

### Ad Age recognized social media’s driving force in the campaign.

“The more recent survey also found more than half of women now believe social media is playing a larger role than traditional media in defining beauty. The ‘Campaign for Real Beauty’ has lived mainly in social media....”

Often hailed as the first transformational social media program for a major consumer brand, the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty provides core lessons for marketers today. The campaign focuses on customers, customer experience and dialogue and relationships between customers.

**Here are three key lessons from the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty for social media marketers that are as relevant today as they were when the campaign first began:**

### One: Make it about the customers, not the brand.

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty demonstrated that social-focused content can drive sales without product messaging. Because Dove didn’t want the campaign to look overtly commercial,

there wasn’t product messaging anywhere on the ads. The URL on the campaign linked to the Dove Foundation, not the brand’s website. You actually can have product information around or incorporated into your social media programming, but it is best subordinated to the social content focus on customers. The Dove social program proves this, as it had no product messaging, yet women could not stop talking about the brand. Dove’s customers were taken by the fact that the brand understood them and empowered them to have these conversations. In short, the Dove campaign is a powerful example of customer-centric emotional marketing versus product message marketing. Here it was cause related, but the principle applies to virtually every product category and every messaging model.

### Two: Drive the campaign through your customers sharing conversations, dialogues, and stories.

What you don’t want to do is passively listen or just have your customers comment on brand stories. Empowering women to tell their stories and build relationships was center to Dove’s success. The campaign was brought alive by having women share their life experiences about body image — and was the first campaign in which traditional media (TV, print, etc.) didn’t just list a URL, but actually included a call to action for people to share their experiences via online community/social media.

We started Dove’s online community in the United States and rolled it out to 24 countries in 27 languages. There was a strong universal resonance among women in every one of these online communities. Throughout the world, women had body image stories that they wanted to tell about themselves, their mothers, grandmothers, daughters, nieces, and their friends. There was a connection among all these women in their countries, and across countries, which drove the entire campaign and set off the PR wildfire.

To highlight common connection between women everywhere, we created an online global map that integrated these 27 communities. A woman could mouse-over a country and see the stories from a woman in that country translated into her language.

For example, a woman from Brazil could see what her sisters in France were saying that day, but translated into Portuguese. While static brand statements might convey the messaging, turning it into a global conversation among women was infinitely more powerful and ratcheted up engagement.

The global community required the use of LiveWorld’s team of



bilingual moderators — who reviewed the quotes to ensure they adhered to brand standards, and then translated them into the various languages— as well as our proprietary moderation and engagement platform.

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### Three: Create emotional engagement.

For any marketing endeavor to be a success, it's crucial to create an emotional engagement with customers and not just broadcast a product message.

Before Dove created the campaign, they looked for a way to truly connect to their customers. They began by interviewing more than 3,000 women. They learned that women did not enjoy the beauty industry and its pressures on them. Over and over, Dove heard that women are tired of trying to fit into the narrow set of “rules” that society has created for them and that mass-market communications for beauty products are full of exaggerated promises and stereotypical, idealized female (super-) models. Many women are left feeling that they do not measure up to the ideals.

For the entire Dove campaign and the social media component specifically, we flipped the traditional marketing model. Rather than

talk about a product helping achieve beauty ideals, we encouraged women to talk about themselves and their beauty that starts within themselves. Women felt empowered that their true selves were not just good enough, but should be celebrated. This created the emotional engagement that continues to fuel the marketing today with the groundbreaking Sketches campaign.

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### Building the brand narrative through customer conversations works.

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty drove sales up by 51% – but the power of the campaign was more than sales. The incredible word of mouth chain reaction, fueled by social media and Dove's online communities, led to incalculable public relations. The campaign was discussed everywhere from Oprah to The View to countless consumer magazines.

Social media gave Dove the opportunity to interact with its customers, create an environment that inspires loyalty – and build a powerful brand narrative through shared stories and experiences, first among its customers and then with the brand. And this connection to its customers is why Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty continues to win accolades, along with the hearts of its women everywhere.




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