

WWD

FASHION ADVERTISING

CONTROVERSY

Where Has It Gone?

By LISA LOCKWOOD

Outrageous, edgy fashion ads that get ever more provocative. Where did they go?

Gone are the scandalous days of Calvin Klein and come-hither youth; Abercrombie's S&B full-frontal Saint Laurent; Benetton's kiss; Jenny McCarthy doing her business on Candie's toilet. It wasn't controversy that killed them. On the contrary, controversy successfully put these and other brands squarely in the limelight, for better or worse.

But after shifts from the shocking and sexually suggestive to socially conscious and lifestyle aspirational, the fashion ad has entered a new state: tame.

Blame it on the media. With so much corporate emphasis on getting the right social campaign, Instagram, Twitter feeds

and the goal of "likes" on Facebook, a global, cross-cultural, and the edge that cuts through the advertising clutter has been

To be sure, there are still beautiful pictures, servers argue that in conscious companies, otherwise, are so intent on how they're perceived has simply become safe equates with boring.

That's not to say it's absent from the fast but it can extract a

recent ouster of Dov Charney, chief executive officer of Abercrombie & Fitch, over concerns about his personal and professional life. And his sexually charged images, often depictions of young women in suggestive poses, may end up being the least of his troubles. He might debate whether Charney is a marketing visionary.



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Ellis Verdi, owner of DeVito/Verdi, the New York ad agency that has done work for such clients as Sony, BMW, Daffy's, Kohl's, Esquire magazine, Time Out magazine, Grey Goose Vodka and Reebok has seen his share of controversy. "Controversial in and of itself is a challenge. If it's just controversial to get headlines and unrelated to the brand, you could be doing yourself a disservice." He said controversial advertising is bound to trigger negative letters even though the majority might like the idea. Sometimes a few negative letters and Facebook posts put clients in the position where they actually want to pull a campaign. "We always look to have truth in our advertising. The more truth you reveal the more you hit a nerve. Almost everything we do gets some degree of notoriety or some kind of reaction," said Verdi. He said he is most offended by advertising that doesn't say anything.

"I believe the digital arena has made clients feel they can control the results of their marketing expense. That sense of control puts clients in a position to look at accountability models and spending payback and they get lazy and they're not talking about a creative solution."

Verdi noted that a marketing meeting today seems more like a technology meeting and there's not enough talk about — marketing. "Technology makes people feel like they can determine and measure results — even though many of those efforts are smaller, they make clients feel more secure. As opposed to big ideas and concepts that might come with less assurance of results but might actually hit it out of the park," he said.

— WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM CYNTHIA MARTENS AND LAUREN MCCARTHY



porn, his brand intentionally or Charney's cause

Benetton, certainly advertising campaigns. Use of shock in its former complaints. Public awareness of tweaking mere s that said "HIV infant. They also AIDS surrounded cite as the most in the history of advertising. Behind these im- n photographer can, still stands approach, most Benetton during 82 to 2000. In an with WWD ear- nth, he said. "If does not provoke, e, thrown your y." Toscani em- hat provocation e force, and said provoke or shock people to think world and to be also cited a pre- of boring imag- nt years. "These all devised by executives with- ence or culture."

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Clockwise from near left: A cheeky ad from Gilly Hicks, the intimates apparel division of Abercrombie & Fitch, in 2009; Daffy's straightjacket ad in 1992 outraged a mental health advocacy group; Diesel's edgy advertising showcases a woman in a denim burka in 2013; Benetton continues to provoke in 2011 with a photoshopped image of President Obama kissing Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, and Tom Ford remains the standard bearer for aggressively sexy imagery, as in 2007.

