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Gienna Shaw, for HealthLeaders Media, July 9, 2008

I recently found myself clicking on a link that opened an online video—one in a series of humorous ads urging men to check themselves for testicular cancer. The person who forwarded the link to me didn't even know I cover healthcare marketing—he just thought I'd get a laugh out of it. Because, you know, there's nothing funnier than testicular cancer.

One of the ads is a bouncy "sing-along" to the tune of the popular Boy Scout song "Do your ears hang low?" with lyrics comprised of the many different slang terms for testicles. Another is a take-off of a 1950s public health film—the kind they used to show in school to warn children about the dangers of poor hygiene and other life-threatening issues. Dr. Harold Rounds deadpans his lines: "Gentleman, there is an important issue you and I need to discuss," he intones. "Your balls."

The whole series of ads is designed to titillate. In fact, the ads are funny, in a bawdy, irreverent, adolescent way. They almost look like a spoof, a campy skit that might appear on a late-night comedy show.

Still, I wasn't sure how to react. Should I be offended? Or impressed?

In the end, I decided to be impressed. Here's why:

- The organization behind the ads clearly knows its audience, males ages 15 to 40. I hate to generalize, but I'm guessing that the ads will appeal to 98% of them.
- The ads are unique and they take a risk—something that's rare in healthcare advertising. Instead of dire warnings or heart-wrenching stories of survival, the campaign is upbeat. Punchy taglines include lines like "Be a man, self exam" and "Do your testicles feel OK?"
- The ads have gone viral—a difficult accomplishment when the "product" is not the latest action movie or a brand of beer.
- And finally, they grab your attention long enough to deliver the serious message and call-to-action. The bouncy sing along, for example, ends with the line: "If your balls are feeling lumpy or they're tender or they're grumpy . . . Go see a physician."

The organization behind the ads is the [Sean Kimerling Testicular Cancer Foundation](#). And its main site is much more traditional than the site where the ads are posted, <http://www.carpetestes.org/>.

So what can you learn from this edgy campaign? A few things:

- Take a calculated risk. It's OK to try something different as long as it is appropriate for your target audience. You might not want to try a similar approach when marketing an assisted living program, for example. (Then again knowing what today's "senior citizens" are like, maybe you would.) Knowing your audience is the key to success in any campaign.
- Intentions count. The Kimerling foundation's mission statement is about as simple as it gets: "Raising public awareness about

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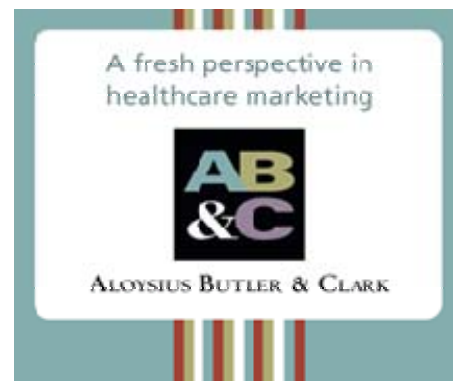
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testicular cancer and the importance of self-examination." It's kind of hard to be offended once you've read that.

- Let your audience do your marketing for you. A campaign such as this one is much more likely to go viral, spreading your message for free.
- Define your boundaries. The main foundation site has a totally different look and feel and has a different URL than the site where the ads are posted. The main foundation site has pages with serious and straightforward information about testicular cancer, such as risk factors, how to perform a self-exam, and what you should do if you find a lump. There's no joking around here.

One last thing: Go ahead and click through to watch the ads—as a healthcare marketing campaign it's job-related after all. They're not exactly PG, but they're not rated X, either.

Still, you might want to turn the volume down on your computer before watching them.

Gienna Shaw is an editor with HealthLeaders magazine. She can be reached at gshaw@healthleadersmedia.com.

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