



What you don't see

Communicate finds out how one lingerie brand tries to be out there without causing outrage by Sidra Tariq

Trendy in. Sexy out. No, we're not talking about *Communicate's* 2011 wardrobe. We are referring to a recent La Senza radio advertisement where the word "sexy" was replaced with "trendy" to suit the region's – you got it – cultural sensitivities.

The ad was part of the lingerie brand's campaign to promote the makeover of its Mall of the Emirates store in Dubai. La Senza is part of Canadian company Limited Brands and is represented in the Arab region by Liwa Trading Enterprises.

The self-censorship in La Senza's campaign doesn't come as a surprise. After all, this is the region where we can see headless (by law) mannequins in Sharjah, and where the franchise of US company Naked Pizza is renamed NKD Pizza.

For the UAE market, the La Senza radio ad goes a little like this: "ABCDEF, make my Cs into double Ds. Sassy? Trendy? Which one's for me? There's a store where all's revealed..."

"Sexy was definitely not allowed," says Joanne Jow, regional brand manager at Liwa Trading Enterprises. "We tried to replace it with 'flirty' and

we were told [by our media agency] that it would be better not to use flirty either."

However, she says changing the word in the radio script wasn't a problem. When you have to market a product such as lingerie in the region, you have to keep cultural sensitivities in mind, and this forces marketers to be creative in terms of strategy.

Across La Senza's markets, the message is the same, but the approach is different, says Jow. "In terms of marketing, the imagery and strategy is directed or deemed by the principles. However, the imagery that is allowed to be used in a Western country, let's say the UK or US, is obviously very different from what we can use here. We take the marketing and direction from Limited Brands, then tailor it to suit this market, ensuring we consider cultural sensitivity."

"For example, the current promotion may be a panty promotion, which will have an image of a model wearing panties. That would be permitted in certain countries, but obviously not here. So to market the product here, we would crop the

image or use a different marketing strategy," she says.

La Senza applied the same principle in promoting the new look of its Mall of the Emirates store. As opposed to a full-length image, the banner in the store's display features the cropped image of a model wearing a baby doll (a short nightgown). "We have cropped the image just beneath the bottom of the baby doll so there is no leg showing," says Jow.

"In other countries, such as Kuwait, the cropped version wouldn't be accepted either. There we would probably go for a message," she adds. "We have also done marketing where we used the products on the mannequin and the message on the window banner to communicate, as opposed to the image."

Other cities in the region are more conservative than Dubai. Neighboring Sharjah, for example, issued a circular in 2008 dictating mannequins should be headless and model "decent" clothing. "In Sharjah, as a rule, we wouldn't display bras and panties on a mannequin in the window," says Jow. "And on the window banners, we'll be permit-

ted to use the image of the bra as opposed to an image of a model wearing a bra."

In print, La Senza grades its advertising. The brand used different ads for different magazines to promote the store. For the not-so-conservative ones, such as *OK Middle East*, La Senza used a cropped image of a model wearing a bra. For the reasonably conservative magazines, the baby doll image, cropped at the bottom of the nightdress, was used.

The advertisements featured in conservative magazines, such as *Sayidaty* and *Ahlan Arabic*, had a black background with a message printed across it. Since the campaign promoted rummable drawers in the store, copy included, "Wanna go through my drawers?"

Marketers everywhere must be creative in their messaging, regardless of the brand they are selling. In the Arab World, they simply have to go one step further to develop witty campaigns that appeal to customers without offending them.

So we may not see sexy or flirty. But what we can hope for is some hot ideas from turned-on marketers. ■