

Procter & Gamble moves from soap operas to tweets

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In this publicity image from video released by Procter & Gamble Co., actor Isaiah Mustafa is shown in a scene from the "Smell Like a Man" ad campaign for Old Spice. (AP Photo/Procter & Gamble Co.) NO SALES

(AP) -- Goodbye, "Guiding Light." Hello, YouTube.

Procter & Gamble Co., whose sponsorship and production of daytime TV dramas helped coin the term "soap operas," has pulled the plug after 77 years. Instead, the maker of Tide detergent, Ivory soap and Olay skincare is following its customers online with a big push on [YouTube](#), Twitter and Facebook.

"The digital media has pretty much exploded," marketing chief Marc Pritchard said in an interview. "It's become very integrated with how we operate, it's become part of the way we do marketing."

The last P&G-produced soap opera, "As The World Turns," went off the air in September. The show was the leading daytime soap for decades, but had lost some two-thirds of its audience at the end.

Over the years, P&G produced 20 soap operas for radio and TV. But ratings for daytime dramas have been sinking for years, as women, their target audience, increasingly moved into the workplace, switched to talk and reality shows, and spent more time using online media and social networking sites.

P&G, the world's biggest advertiser, still buys individual commercials on daytime dramas. But the dollar amount has shrunk. P&G won't say by how much.

Dori Molitor, whose WomanWise LLC agency specializes in marketing brands to women, says big companies are realizing that social media is an efficient way to connect with customers.

"Social media has become mass media, and for women especially," she said. "I think for all marketers, these one-way, 30-second (TV) spots are very expensive, and are less effective for the way that women make decisions."

Marketing experts say the biggest companies were generally slow to adapt to the rapid rise of social networks, but that beverage rivals Coca-Cola Co. and Pepsico Inc., and P&G and fellow consumer products makers Unilever PLC and Johnson & Johnson are among those quickly making up for lost time.

In recent months, P&G began selling Pampers diapers on Facebook, offering an iPhone application for Always feminine products that allows women to track menstrual cycles and ask experts questions, and using social media to turn a campaign for the venerable Old Spice brand into a

pop-culture icon.

The "Smell like a Man, Man" commercials starring hunky former football player Isaiah Mustafa became a YouTube sensation, drawing tens of millions of views and spawning parodies such as one with Sesame Street's Grover, and generated another round of attention with Twitter questions that Mustafa answered in videos - such as on ABC's Good Morning America when he suggested that President Barack Obama could improve standing with female voters by wearing only a towel and beginning speeches with "Hello, Ladies!"

The echo effect gives P&G a bigger bang for its nearly 9 billion bucks a year spent on advertising.

"It is such an effective advertising campaign that we are getting impressions that we did not pay for," CEO Bob McDonald told investors recently, recounting that he saw an editorial cartoon showing Obama on horseback, a takeoff on Mustafa's "I'm on a horse" Old Spice catchphrase.

For a company known for measuring just about everything, P&G touts big numbers from Old Spice tracking:

- Number of impressions (people who saw, read, or heard about commercials): 1.8 billion.
- Number of YouTube views for Old Spice and related videos: 140 million and counting.
- Increase in Twitter followers for Old Spice: 2,700 percent.

P&G also said Old Spice sales are growing at double digits, taking more of the market for body washes and deodorant.

Just 20 months ago, P&G hosted "digital night" at its Cincinnati headquarters by inviting Google, Facebook, Twitter and other online experts to help test ways online and digital media could be used in marketing. By the Vancouver Winter Olympics last February, P&G was coordinating TV commercials with Facebook messages and tracking instant reactions to new commercials on Twitter.

P&G, which sponsored Team USA, unveiled sentimental "Thank you, Mom!" commercials at the Olympics that it estimates added \$100 million in sales. The campaign has included Facebook essay contests and e-Cards for mothers.

P&G says it's still exploring new uses for social media.

"It's kind of the oldest form of marketing - word of mouth - with the newest form of technology," Pritchard said.

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