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I write about great brands and their strategies.

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Lane Bryant Changes The Conversation About Women And Perceptions About Its Brand

An entire New York City F train emblazoned with large photographs of sexy women in lingerie certainly got people's attention. It also sparked a change in the cultural conversation about women, beauty, and plus-sized bodies — and just as importantly, it changed perceptions of Lane Bryant, the brand behind the bold outdoor ad.

[Lane Bryant's "I'm No Angel" campaign](#) was born out a need to revive the business and make the brand more relevant, but its approach reached further. [Brian Beitler](#), Lane Bryant's EVP/CMO, described the campaign's objectives and strategies in his presentation at the [Millennium Alliance's Transformational CMO Assembly](#) and in a follow-up interview I conducted with him.



Credit: Lane Bryant website

He explained that although Lane Bryant (owned by Charming Shoppes [NASDAQ: CHRS](#)) has been the largest specialty brand in women's plus sizes, it had suffered from being perceived as conservative, traditional, and not on trend and fashionable. In addition to reinvigorating the

brand, Beitler and his team saw a greater opportunity. “We wanted to help women in general see how significant the brand was and to help them better understand who we are and what we believe about women,” he explained.

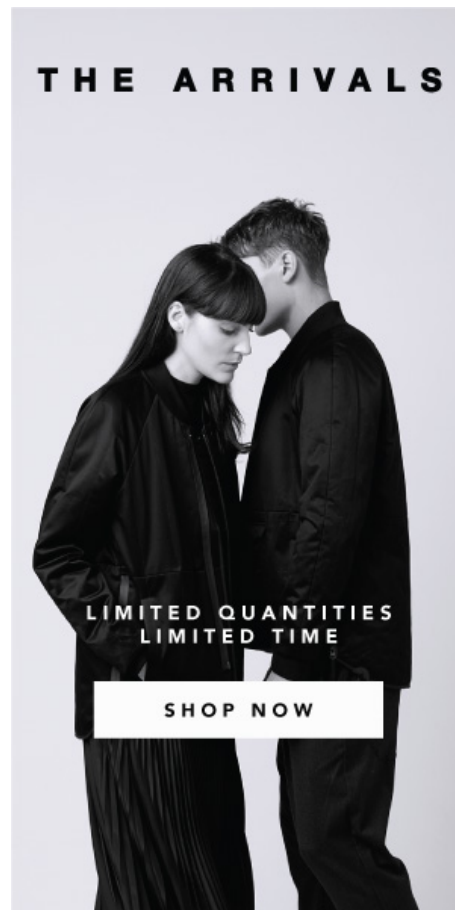
Lane Bryant perceived a major cultural issue that needed to change and to be talked about: how women see themselves and what women must look like to be considered sexy. The team decided to challenge the stereotypes of beauty and the notion that fashion is the exclusive purview of the select skinny few normally shown in the media.

They launched “I’m No Angel,” featuring gorgeous plus-size models sporting the brand’s new lingerie collection, Cacique by Lane Bryant. The stylish, sexy images and #ImNoAngel headline/hashtag was a not-so-subtle jab at Victoria’s Secret (owned by L Brands [NYSE:LTD](#)), which uses a similar creative approach and refers to its models as angels. The campaign included TV spots to produce the broadest exposure as well as outdoor ads including wrapping an F train and posting on a 20 foot wall on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles to generate images that could be shared on social media.

And social media did indeed light up with the kinds of conversations Beitler and his team wanted to spark. Scores of women shared about how the message resonated with them and young girls posted that the campaign changed their outlook on body image. Over 16 billion social and media impressions were generated worldwide in the four weeks following the launch.

One woman told Beitler how the campaign changed the way she felt about herself. “When I walk across the threshold [into a Lane Bryant store],” she said, “the ‘plus’ drops and I’m just a woman.” By helping women like her feel more confident about themselves and feel more affinity with the brand, the campaign generated strong sales increases for the company and it has been acquiring new customers at a much faster pace than any time in the brand’s history, Beitler reported.

Beitler shared the primary principles that drove the campaign’s success:



1. We're shifting from brand as storyteller to brand as conversationalist. "In world where we've become more social and able to communicate more quickly and share more of our and others' thoughts very quickly," Beitler said, "brands no longer direct the conversation and stories about themselves. Your brand is shaped by the conversations people are having about you and so you have to get better in having conversations with consumers if you want to shape how they relate and connect to you."

2. Building a social brand is not about social media; it's about having a social perspective through every channel. He knew that, given Lane Bryant's size as a retailer, it could spark a conversation that would be widely represented if it did it right. So his team crafted every aspect of "I'm No Angel" to be sharable — from the quality and type of creative to the highly share-worthy outdoor ads.

3. The capability to engage in real time conversation is key. When the campaign launched, some consumers felt like Lane Bryant was skinny shaming and tried to call out the brand. But because Beitler and his team had anticipated the challenge and had prepared to have a conversation in real time, they were ready with a response. They had developed language to share such as "We're not throwing shade, we're throwing curves" and offset some of the negativity by explaining the campaigns' tongue-in-cheek spirit in the PR coverage.

4. Your most social media is your sales associate. The campaign wasn't only executed in media. The company had shored up its store hiring practices to attract "associates of all sizes," Beitler reported — and it ran training and engagement programs to help the associates know how to talk about the campaign with customers in store and in their own networks.

5. The most effective way to reduce media spend is to create a great idea. The results of "I'm No Angel" were so significant, it's hard to believe that the company's ad spend was only \$6 million. Because there was such an immense appetite for the conversation, the approach resonated, Beitler explained. He also acknowledged that the campaign built upon the groundwork laid by Dove, Always, and others working to redefine stereotypes, so it benefitted

from people who wanted to continue the momentum those brands had created about body acceptance.

In summarizing the campaign, Beitler said that they have “started the journey, but haven’t accomplished the mission yet, both with the conversation and the performance in the business.” And he promised more to come this month.

Denise Lee Yohn is a brand-building expert, speaker and author of [What Great Brands Do](#) and the upcoming book, Extraordinary Experiences. [Contact](#) / [Twitter](#).

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