

# CASE 4-1 Tambrands—Overcoming Cultural Resistance

Tampax, Tambrands's only product, is the best-selling tampon in the world, with 44 percent of the global market. North America and Europe account for 90 percent of those sales. Company earnings dropped 12 percent to \$82.8 million on revenues of \$662 million. Stakes are high for Tambrands because tampons are basically all it sells, and in the United States, which currently generates 45 percent of Tambrands's sales, the company is mired in competition with such rivals as Playtex Products and Kimberly-Clark. What's more, new users are hard to get because 70 percent of women already use tampons.

In the overseas market, Tambrands officials talk glowingly of a huge opportunity. Only 100 million of the 1.7 billion eligible women in the world currently use tampons. In planning for expansion into a global market, Tambrands divided the world into three clusters, based not on geography but on how resistant women are to using tampons. The goal is to market to each cluster in a similar way.

Most women in Cluster 1, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, already use tampons and may feel they know all they need to know about the product. In Cluster 2, which includes countries such as France, Israel, and South Africa, about 50 percent of women use tampons. Some concerns about virginity remain, and tampons are often considered unnatural products that block the flow. Tambrands enlists gynecologists' endorsements to stress scientific research on tampons. Potentially the most lucrative group—but infinitely more challenging—is Cluster 3, which includes countries like Brazil, China, and Russia. There, along with tackling the virginity issue, Tambrands must also tell women how to use a tampon without making them feel uneasy. While the advertising messages differ widely from country to country, Tambrands is also trying to create a more consistent image for its Tampax tampons. The ads in each country show consecutive shots of women standing outside declaring the tampon message, some clutching a blue box of Tampax. They end with the same tagline, "Tampax. Women Know." While marketing consultants say Tambrands' strategy is a step in the right direction, some caution that tampons are one of the most difficult products to market worldwide.

## GLOBAL EXPANSION

"The greatest challenge in the global expansion of tampons is to address the religious and cultural mores that suggest that insertion is fundamentally prohibited by culture," says the managing director of a consulting company. "The third market [Cluster 3] looks like the great frontier of tampons, but it could be the seductive noose of the global expansion objective."

The company's new global campaign for Tambrands is a big shift from most feminine protection product ads, which often show frisky women dressed in white pants biking or turning cartwheels, while discreetly pushing messages of comfort. The new campaign features local women talking frankly about what had been a taboo subject in many countries. A recent Brazilian ad shows a close-up of a tampon while the narrator chirps, "It's sleek, smooth, and really comfortable to use."

For years Tambrands has faced a delicate hurdle selling Tampax tampons in Brazil because many young women fear they'll lose their

virginity if they use a tampon. When they go to the beach in tiny bikinis, tampons aren't their choice. Instead, hordes of women use pads and gingerly wrap a sweater around their waist. Now, the number 1 tampon maker hopes a bold new ad campaign will help change the mindset of Brazilian women. "Of course, you're not going to lose your virginity," reassures one cheerful Brazilian woman in a new television ad. Tambrands's risky new ads are just part of a high-stakes campaign to expand into overseas markets where it has long faced cultural and religious sensitivities. The new ads feature local women being surprisingly blunt about such a personal product. In China, another challenging market for Tambrands, a new ad shows a Chinese woman inserting a tampon into a test tube filled with blue water. "No worries about leakage," declares another.

"In any country, there are boundaries of acceptable talk. We want to go just to the left of that," says the creative director of the New York advertising agency that is creating Tambrands's \$65 million ad campaign worldwide. "We want them to think they have not heard frankness like this before." The agency planned to launch new Tampax ads in 26 foreign countries and the United States. However, being a single-product company, it is a risky proposition for Tambrands to engage in a global campaign and to build a global distribution network all at the same time. Tambrands concluded that the company could not continue to be profitable if its major market was the United States and that to launch a global marketing program was too risky to do alone.

## PROCTER & GAMBLE ACQUIRES TAMBRANDS

The company approached Procter & Gamble about a buyout, and the two announced a \$1.85 billion deal. The move puts P&G back in the tampon business for the first time since its Rely brand was pulled in 1980 after two dozen women who used tampons died from toxic shock syndrome. Procter & Gamble plans to sell Tampax as a complement to its existing feminine-hygiene products, particularly in Asia and Latin America. Known for its innovation in such mundane daily goods as disposable diapers and detergent, P&G has grown in recent years by acquiring products and marketing them internationally. "Becoming part of P&G—a world-class company with global marketing and distribution capabilities—will accelerate the global growth of Tampax and enable the brand to achieve its full potential. This will allow us to take the expertise we've gained in the feminine protection business and apply it to a new market with Tampax." Market analysts applauded the deal. "P&G has the worldwide distribution that Tampax so desperately needs," said a stock market analyst. "Tambrands didn't have the infrastructure to tap into growth in the developing countries and P&G does."

## P&G CREATES A GLOBAL MODEL

Despite the early promise that Brazil seemed to offer with its beach culture and mostly urban population, P&G abandoned Tambrands's marketing efforts there as too expensive and slow-growing. Instead, it set out to build a marketing model that it could export to

the rest of the globe. P&G began studying cities in Mexico and chose Monterrey, an industrial hub of 4 million people—with 1.2 million women as its target customers—as a prime test spot. Research and focus groups of Mexican women in Monterrey resulted in a new marketing approach based on education.

“Everywhere we go, women say ‘this is not for señoritas,’” says Silvia Davila, P&G’s marketing director for Tampax Latin America. They’re using the Spanish word for unmarried women as a modest expression for young virgins. This concern crops up in countries that are predominantly Catholic, executives say. In Italy, for instance, just 4 percent of women use tampons. P&G is finding that in countries where school health education is limited, that concept is difficult to overcome. P&G marketers say they often find open boxes of tampons in stores—a sign, P&G says, that women were curious about the product but unsure as to how it worked.

Hanging out in blue jeans and tank tops and sipping Diet Pepsi on a recent afternoon, Sandra Trevino and her friends seem very much in tune with American culture. But the young women are getting a lesson in Trevino’s living room on how to use a product that is commonplace in the United States—and is a mystery to them.

“We’re giving you the opportunity to live differently ‘those days’ of the month,” Karla Romero tells the group. She holds up a chart of the female body, then passes out samples to the 10 women. Tampons will bring freedom and discretion, Romero says. “For me, it’s the best thing that ever happened.” A few of the women giggle. Romero is on the front lines of a marketing campaign for one of the world’s most in-the-closet products. Procter & Gamble Co. pays Romero to give a primer on tampons in gatherings that resemble Tupperware parties.

Romero and other counselors run through a slide show about the stages of puberty. She pours blue liquid through a stand-up model of a woman’s reproductive tract so the girls can see what happens inside their bodies when they have their periods. They see the tampon absorb the blue fluid. Romero points to the hymen on the model and explains they won’t lose their virginity with a tampon. Still, when Maria brought home a sample from another session a few months ago, “my mother said don’t use them,” she reported. While the 18-year-old can be rebellious—she wears a tiny tank top, heavy blue eye shadow, and three gold studs in each ear—she shares her mother’s doubts. “You can lose your virginity. The norm here is to marry as a virgin,” she says.

In addition to in-home demonstrations, counselors in navy pantsuits or doctor’s white coats embroidered with the Tampax logo speak in stores, schools, and gyms—anywhere women gather. One counselor met with 40 late-shift women workers in a cookie factory at midnight.

Counselors are taught to approach the subject in a dignified and sensitive manner. For example, they avoid using the word “tampon,” which is too close to the Spanish word *tampone*, meaning plug. P&G calls its product an “internal absorbent” or simply Tampax.

Although tampons currently account for just 4 percent of the total Mexican market for feminine-protection products, early results indicate P&G’s investment is paying off. Sales for Tampax tripled in the first 12 months after the new program was launched.

Based on the success in Mexico, P&G picked Venezuela to be its next market because it is relatively small—23 million people—and its population are mostly urban. P&G gathered women in Caracas for focus groups where they expressed some cultural similarities with their Mexican counterparts, emphasizing the sanctity of virginity. But the tropical weather fostered some promising

differences too. There’s a party culture where women seem comfortable with their bodies in skimpy skirts and clingy pants.

This attitude led P&G marketers to conclude that Tampax advertising could be racier in Venezuela. One slogan, though, misfired. On a list of common misconceptions, headed by “will I lose my virginity?” P&G wrote, “La ignorancia es la madre de todo los mitos,” which translates as “ignorance is the mother of all myths.” Focus groups were offended: “In a Latin culture, ignorance and mother don’t go together.” The title was scrapped.

In the end, they unveiled ads like “Es Tiempo De Cambiar Las Reglas,” for billboards, buses, and magazines. The company knows that Venezuelan women will catch the pun: “reglas” is the slang they use for their period, but the ad also translates as “It’s time to change the rules.”

## GETTING THE MESSAGE ONLINE

P&G has always been an early and aggressive adopter of new media, dating back to radio and television. Continuing in this vein, Procter & Gamble is stepping up its Internet activity to use the Web as a marketing medium. P&G’s idea is to attract consumers to interactive sites that will be of interest to particular target groups, with the hope of developing deeper relationships with consumers. Its first step was to launch a Web site for teenage girls with information on puberty and relationships, promoting products such as Clearasil, Sunny Delight, and Tampax. The Web site, [www.beinggirl.com](http://www.beinggirl.com), was designed with the help of an advisory board of teenage girls.

This site has been expanded to include an online interactive community for teen girls between 14 and 19 years of age, which urges teenage girls to get the most out of life. The site includes a variety of subjects that interest teen girls, as well as an interactive game that lets girls pick from five available “effortless” boyfriends. Characters range from Mysterious and Arty to Sporty. The chosen boyfriend will send confidence-boosting messages and provide girls with a series of “Effortless Guides” to things like football. If the girl gets bored of her boyfriend, she can dump him using a variety of excuses, such as “It’s not you, it’s me,” and choose another. As one company source stated, “interactive Web sites have become the number one medium, and boys are the number one topic for teenage girls.”

A feature of the site, “urban myths,” discusses many of the concerns about the use of tampons and related products. Visit [www.beinggirl.co.uk](http://www.beinggirl.co.uk) for the British market and [www.beinggirl.co.in](http://www.beinggirl.co.in) for a comparable site for India. Hindustan Lever has a similar campaign built around the Sunsilkgangofgirls community portal ([www.sunsilkgangofgirls.com](http://www.sunsilkgangofgirls.com)) for its products.

## PUBLIC HEALTH FOR YOUNG GIRLS

In those markets where the Web is not readily available to the target market, a more direct and personal approach entails a health and education emphasis. The P&G brands Always and Tampax have joined forces with HERO, an awareness building and fundraising initiative of the United Nations Association, to launch the “Protecting Futures” program ([www.protectingfutures.com](http://www.protectingfutures.com)), designed to help give girls in Africa a better chance at an education.

Girls living in sub-Saharan Africa often miss up to four days of school each month because they lack the basic necessities of sanitary protection and other resources to manage their periods. According to research, 1 in 10 school-age African girls do not attend school during menstruation or drop out at puberty because of the lack of clean and private sanitation facilities in schools. If a girl

has no access to protective materials or if the materials she has are unreliable and cause embarrassment, she may be forced to stay at home. This absence of approximately 4 days every four weeks may result in the girl missing 10 to 20 percent of her school days.

“Working with HERO, the Protecting Futures is a comprehensive care program which brings puberty education, a traveling healthcare provider for all the children at these schools, nutritious feeding programs, educational support services, a pad distribution program, and significant construction projects to add restrooms and upgrade the school buildings. Support for this program is part of the P&G corporate cause, Live, Learn, and Thrive which has helped over 50 million children in need.”

In addition, Tampax and Always brands help sponsor the HERO Youth Ambassador program ([www.beingirl.com/hero](http://www.beingirl.com/hero)) through their teen-focused Web site. Twenty-four teens from across the United States were selected to become Youth Ambassadors and travel to Namibia and South Africa to work on the Protecting Futures program. Their personal experiences were documented in a series of webisodes airing on [beingirl.com/hero](http://beingirl.com/hero) to help encourage and empower all teens to become global citizens. All of this effort is done with the idea that better health education and the use of the company’s products will result in fewer days absent from school and, thus, better education for female students.

## QUESTIONS

1. Evaluate the wisdom of Tambrands becoming part of Procter & Gamble.
2. Tambrands indicated that the goal of its global advertising plan was to “market to each cluster in a similar way.” Discuss this goal. Should P&G continue with Tambrands’s original goal adapted to the new educational program? Why? Why not?
3. For each of the three clusters identified by Tambrands, identify the cultural resistance that must be overcome. Suggest possible approaches to overcoming the resistance you identify.
4. In reference to the approaches you identified in Question 3, is there an approach that can be used to reach the goal of “marketing to each cluster in a similar way”?
5. P&G is marketing in Venezuela with its “Mexican” model. Should the company reopen the Brazilian market with the same model? Discuss.
6. A critic of the “Protecting Futures” program comments, “If you believe the makers of Tampax tampons, there’s a direct link between using Western feminine protection and achieving higher education, good health, clean water and longer life.” Comment.

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Sources: Yumiko Ono, “Tambrands Ads Aim to Overcome Cultural and Religious Obstacles,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 17, 1997, p. B8; Sharon Walsh, “Procter & Gamble Bids to Acquire Tambrands; Deal Could Expand Global Sales of Tampax,” *The Washington Post*, April 10, 1997, p. C01; Ed Shelton, “P&G to Seek Web Friends,” *The European*, November 16, 1998, p. 18; Emily Nelson and Miriam Jordan, “Sensitive Export: Seeking New Markets for Tampons, P&G Faces Cultural Barriers,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 8, 2000, p. A1; *Weekend Edition Sunday (NPR)*, March 12, 2000; “It’s Hard to Market the Unmentionable,” *Marketing Week*, March 13, 2002, p. 19; Richard Weiner, “A Candid Look at Menstrual Products—Advertising and Public Relations,” *Public Relations Quarterly*, Summer 2004; “Procter & Gamble and Warner Bros. Pictures Announce ‘Sisterhood’ between New Movie and Popular Teen Web Site,” *PR Newswire*, June 1, 2005; “Tampax Aims to Attract Teens With New ‘Effortless’ Message,” *Revolution* (London), May 2006; “It’s Back; Dotcom Funding Has Jumped 10 Times to \$166 Million,” *Business Today*, May 2006; “Emerging Markets Force San Pro Makers to Re-examine Priorities,” *Euromonitor International*, November 2007; “Tampax and Always Launch Protecting Futures Program Dedicated to Helping African Girls Stay in School,” *USA, Discussion Lounge, Africa*, December 4, 2007; “Can Tampons Be Cool?” *Slate*, <http://www.Slate.com>, January 15, 2007; “Where Food, Water Is a Luxury, Tampons Are Low on Priorities,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 10, 2008.