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RB Has Repositioned Durex For The COVID Generation

by [David Ridley](#)

In a series of striking interventions, Reckitt Benckiser has transformed its flagship condoms and lubricants brand Durex for a new generation shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reckitt Benckiser's flagship sexual health brand Durex has been on quite a journey this year.

In February, the firm launched a global re-positioning with new visual identity for the brand, which long-term creative partners Havas London said was aimed at "railing against sexual taboos, stigmas and outdated, non-inclusive attitudes."

Based on the results of the 2017 Durex Global Sex Survey – which found that two-thirds of consumers were "not fully satisfied" with their sex lives – the relaunch began in the UK with a St Valentine's Day manifesto followed by a series of eye-catching out-of-home advertisements pointing to specific findings of the survey.

"Let's make sex in 2020 about everyone," RB announced in a blogpost on the Durex website. "Let's breakdown norms, let's tackle the taboos, let's promote inclusivity but most importantly, let's shatter expectations."

"Porn's not the norm" – stated one of the OOH ads, alongside the finding that "71% of young guys go online for the inspiration in the bedroom."

"Something to spread" – said another, with a warning that "1 in 2 of us have never been tested for STDs."

Code-Breaking

Reflecting on the campaign in a podcast, Havas London partner and head of strategy for the

agency's RB account, Chantelle Begley, said that the Durex repositioning was all about challenging the "codes and category norms" associated with sex up to that point.

"The brand footprint before this was about couples, love and intimacy," Begley told On Strategy Showcase host Fergus O'Carroll. "We were really putting the pressure on people by painting this picture of 50 Shades of Grey, silk sheets, hotel bedrooms and subservient female roles."

One of the biggest "enemies" to safe sex, Begley said, was the making of excuses with regards to using a condom. "We wanted to remind people that this wasn't good enough," she said. "You have every right to carry, use or introduce a condom and no one should make you feel otherwise."

But then the coronavirus hit and the lockdown happened. Interestingly, RB were in a perfect position having rebranded Durex as a challenger of the status quo.

Responding almost seamlessly to changing conditions, "Phase 2" of the ongoing repositioning featured a new manifesto headed "Let's not go back to normal."

"For too long normal just wasn't good enough," the manifesto began. "Normal was making rubbish excuses for not wearing a condom. Normal was shaming women for even carrying one."

The manifesto ended with a call for "when it's time to get back out on the streets and jump back in the sheets, let's not go back to normal."

Normal Not Good Enough

"Other brands were talking about getting back to normal," Begley explained. "But for us, normal wasn't good enough."

A recent survey by RB suggested that trends towards higher rates of STIs in the UK, for example, may have been slowed by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Whilst in lockdown and by adhering to strict restrictions, it is believed this trend has been disrupted," RB noted on the Durex blog. "However, after this prolonged period of sexual abstinence for many, with lockdown rules continuing to relax, there is a possibility that the trend could return to its original trajectory."

As the UK emerged out of lockdown, RB with Havas launched a short film to try to help reverse this trend and maintain positive intimate health habits developed during the pandemic.

"It's been pretty weird lately," the voiceover notes. "But that's what makes 2020 important."

“This is a call to arms, legs, bums and private parts,” it continues. “Let’s not go back to normal.”

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“We were using the corona moment to say let’s really pause and rethink all these things we are under pressure to do and say,” Begley said.

RB’s new survey – which was completed by 18 to 35-year-old UK singles in May – also found some interesting “kernels” about “how people saw themselves, their health and each other” as a result of this coronavirus “reset,” Begley continued.

Over half of respondents (59%) said that lockdown had “significantly shifted” their mindset when it came to the idea of protecting themselves or others, RB reported, with 48% of people also agreeing that the pandemic had made them much more conscious of other viruses (including STIs).

“Both findings indicate a change in attitude towards sexual and general wellbeing, hopefully bringing the promise of a change to hurtful day-to-day sexual habits and sexual norms that some have come to accept, such as unprotected sex,” the firm commented.

New Sex Habits

The survey also identified a number of new habits that respondents said they would keep or do more of post-lockdown which would go towards ensuring their sexual wellbeing:

- 87% said they would keep taking or do more to take better care of theirs and others sexual health;
- 82% said they would keep thinking twice or start to think twice about having a one-night stand;
- 85% said they would not judge people for wanting to use a condom.

“Everyone is talking about going back to normal. But nobody is questioning whether we should,” commented RB’s Sexual Wellbeing global category director, Ben Wilson. “We’re taking it upon ourselves to challenge that normal, because nobody should want to go back to a world that wasn’t working for everyone.”

“We see emergence from lockdown as a potentially vital turning point in the world’s fight against

sexually transmitted infections,” he continued. “By launching the ‘Let’s Not Go Back To Normal’ campaign we hope to inspire and encourage people to reflect on their time in lockdown and think about the positive behaviours they will take forward, but the established attitudes to protecting ourselves and others will remain.”

“Whether it’s us as a brand making the condom experience better for users; individuals feeling confident enough to discuss more protection with their partners and stopping to make bad excuses for not using one; or young people having education on, and access to condoms, we all have a role to play in keeping STIs in lockdown,” he insisted.

Not Finished Yet

But RB is not done with the Durex repositioning yet. This was only the “second chapter” after the “opening handshake,” Begley said.

“Things are still being released, based on the things we are seeing, on loosening restrictions, going back into lockdown etc,” she revealed.

“Here’s a moment in time when we can change people’s perception of their sexual health its value and how to protect ourselves and each other,” she insisted. “Here’s a moment in time to reset and rethink ... everything, including how you have sex and who you have it with.”