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Why These Agency Execs Went Through Hell to Get Naked in These Ads (SFW)

A rebranding that's more than skin deep By Tim Nudd

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Rebranding is rebirth. New York design and marketing firm Mode Design Group—which today becomes full-service agency **Viceroy Creative**—took that notion pretty seriously, as its principals posed for rebranding ads stark naked, fresh from the brand ID womb.

The concept—an intentional echo of **Stefan Sagmeister and Jessica Walsh getting naked** for the 2012 announcement of their partnership—is fun and provocative. In practice, it wasn't so easy. Any rebranding has to be perfect. And more than anything, that meant getting in impeccable shape for the photos—shot by Robert Wyatt, who also photographed the "**Equinox Made Me Do It**" campaign.

AdFreak asked (below, l. to r.) president David Moritz, creative director Gabrielle Rein, CFO Aaron Bearce and account manager Raegan Gillette what it was like shooting the campaign, and what it took to get there.

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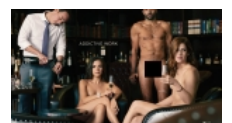
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Why These Agency Execs Went Through Hell to Get Naked in These Ads (SFW)



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So, this photo shoot must have been ... interesting. I take it you're all very close and not overly bashful.

Moritz: This is a tough industry to be bashful in, but you do need to just jump right in when it's time to disrobe, at 9 a.m., while sober. We are a close group, though. We've all traveled together, worked closely together, and took the time to mentally prepare for shoot day. We should have done some anti-dress rehearsals, though. We didn't think of doing that.

Gillette: I am actually incredibly bashful! But luckily I had a lot of time to mentally prepare myself for that initial disrobe. Because our team is so close, it made the entire process comfortable. And after that initial disrobe, the rest was a piece of cake.



Where did the idea come from to pose nude like this?

Moritz: I've known that we needed to reposition our agency to align with the work that we were actually doing, and I wanted clients to notice and understand that, more than just saying "and we do XYZ also." So that had been on my mind.

I remembered when [Stefan Sagmeister and Jessica Walsh's] S&W campaign came out, everyone in the industry was just like, "Naked, name change, cool. Tell me more about that." So I thought, that's interesting. Then Gabrielle had to see a 3+ Equinox trainer as part of essentially physical therapy to get herself back in shape after having a baby. She loved the experience and recommended that I try it. So I told them, Listen, I don't need to move boulders in my day to day experience. Possibly never. Fight a bear. Even run anywhere. The one and only thing that I care about is aesthetics. And they were like, Ok, we'll get you cut up like an underwear model (minus the tall handsome model part).

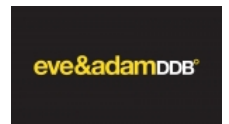
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Then I'm thinking Gabrielle and are I both with these trainers that are advertised to be able to "transform" you. And then somewhere it all clicked—underwear models, intense physical training, name change, repositioning, parody Sagmeister Walsh with a twist, take it further, make it funnier in a deadpan way, make it fashion and luxury but self-aware. I tested the idea out on a few people and across the board, everyone loved it.

David Gianatasio	Gabriel Beltrone
David Griner	Roo Ciambriello
Alfred Maskeroni	David Kiefaber



How did the shoot go? Were there some awkward moments?

Moritz: You mean when we were standing around naked all day in our office while it was a normal day for Aaron and everyone else working there? It was never awkward for me, especially as step one was for the two lovely makeup artists to rub down my entire body with makeup. Robert was a real professional, but kept up a lighthearted atmosphere. He set the tone and set everyone at ease immediately. He kept trying to get Aaron to take his clothes off anyway.

Rein: We didn't have time to think about the fact that we're standing there naked in a room full of clothed people. Robert and his team were so professional, and we moved quickly through many scenes. About halfway through, the no-sugar-added Louis Roederer Brut Nature Champagne came out, followed by cocktails at the end of the day.

Gillette: You can't help but blush when the makeup artist has you disrobe to "make-up" your backside at 8:30 a.m., in the middle of your office, while the rest of the company is going about their day. I can't say I wasn't caught off guard with that one.



Aaron, why didn't you strip down with everyone else?

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Bearce: Truthfully, I think I'm a little more conservative than the rest of the group. I was on the fence about it from the beginning. Ultimately, we decided that having me in a full suit, conducting the business of the agency with all this chaos around me, added some humor to the campaign and a subtle message that we aren't just creatives. We are also businesspeople just like the clients we are privileged to serve. Or at least that's how I managed to justify it with my colleagues.

So, you all worked out with Equinox Tier 3+ trainers five days a week. I suppose in any rebranding, everything has to look perfect, right?

Moritz: 3+, don't forget the Plus for Plus cardio. So that's seven days a week, which includes every single day.

Rein: Visually, everything should be as close to perfect as we can imagine. This is one piece and part of the whole thing. The nudity aspect happens to be perhaps the most interesting to people, but the overall work had to be perfect—the meticulous handcrafting of every letter in the logo, everything.

Gabrielle, you were five months post-baby on the shoot day. Was it particularly challenging for you to get in shape for this stunt?

Rein: I had the longest road, but for me it was both fitness and therapy. Some percentage of it I had to do, I was rebuilding my abdominal wall after giving birth. That's why I joined Equinox in the first place. I had to get strong enough and build up my core so that I could actually exercise and do a full-body workout and weight lifting. It's an added challenge to have the energy to work out like that along with the sleep deprivation that comes with a new baby. I didn't want to let the rest of the team down. I still wanted to look just as good as everybody else. But what a great motivator to get back in shape quickly to my pre-baby weight, and it was great to have the support of other people doing it, too. I'm actually in better shape now than before I got pregnant!



I'm told you guys also went on a strict elimination diet custom tailored by a Hollywood nutritionist. That sounds painful.

Moritz: We had only 30 days until shoot day and so we had to go on an unusually extreme diet immediately. Large amounts of protein, little else, everything measured by the ounce, almonds counted individually. Intense. Then, you continue the weight training and add a certain kind of low intensity cardio so that you're in a major calorie deficit each day. You get your body all the nutrients that it needs to be healthy and to support continued muscle growth, but you force it to live off of stored fat—and that's how you burn the fat and get the abs showing. And the body hates having to do that and lets you know that it's functional but grumpy. So, the muscle stays and the fat goes and you live. I got down to about 5-6 percent body fat by shoot day. Also, no alcohol. This was the longest I have ever gone without drinking since I was 15. Anything for my clients.

Rein: I wanted to cheat this diet every single day. But I didn't. I wasn't exactly hungry, just angry because I didn't get to eat the things that I like and I had to eat pretty much the exact same thing every single day, which is torture.

Photographer Robert Wyatt took the photos. Why him?

Rein: We love his work for the "Equinox Made Me Do It" campaign. We like the style of it, we think it's fashionable and also funny. We like the odd situations that the models were placed in, the humor but also the athleticism and how their bodies were shown in a natural way. We liked the overall tone. Knowing that Robert shot that campaign, it was really the perfect fit because we wanted to take that style and do it in our own fresh way in our office. We wanted to bring that irreverence and fashion to a corporate setting.



In the end, what do you want potential clients to think when they see these photos?

Moritz: I want them to notice our agency and then look at the work that we've done. We do some ambitious things, some beautiful things, in an entrepreneurial, efficient way. We can be partners. So I want them to think, "I want to work with those guys. I want them to help me meet this goal creatively." Because of the work. Or because of the bodies, either way.

Rein: I want them to laugh. I want them to actually think this is funny. I want them to think that we're a great agency that maybe they just never knew about. A hidden gem.

Bearce: Ultimately, we all understand that Viceroy Creative will be judged based on our entire "body" of work, so we're putting it all out there and leaving very little to the imagination. I want prospective clients to see that we are a creative agency at our core. We take our work seriously and will do just about anything for our clients, but we also have a sense of humor and a camaraderie that is different than what exists at bigger firms. When brand managers see this campaign, I want them to say, "Wow, these guys are different and they're not afraid to take a calculated risk."

Gillette: That this agency will go above and beyond the ask. What initially drew me to working with this team was the level of dedication they have for their colleagues, work and clients. It far exceeds that of any other agency. This entire campaign is a perfect example of our dedication toward meeting an end goal. We set our minds on something and we achieved it.

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Brilliant campaign, except they are not models but executives. Imagine trying to negotiate with the client after they have seen you nude.

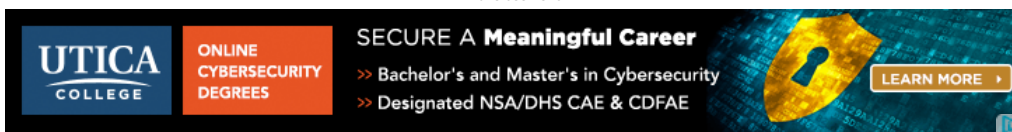
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