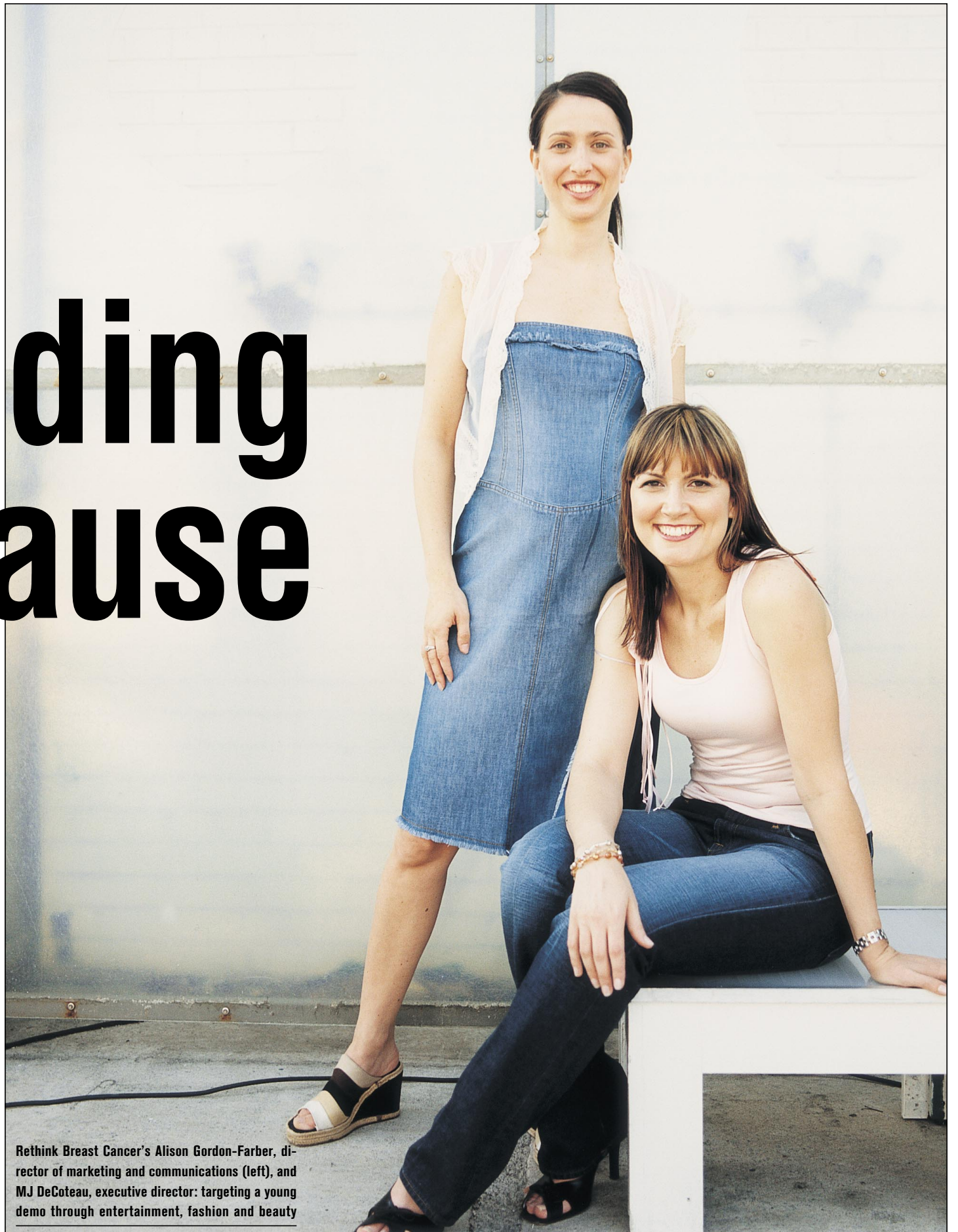


Branding a Cause

Rethink Breast Cancer is a new kind of charity, a stylish brand targeting media-savvy people 18 to 34 turned off by tug-at-your-heartstrings public service ads

BY LESLEY YOUNG



Rethink Breast Cancer's Alison Gordon-Farber, director of marketing and communications (left), and MJ DeCoteau, executive director: targeting a young demo through entertainment, fashion and beauty

It's nearly dusk and there are 40 models wearing only underwear on the rooftop of downtown Toronto nightclub Skybar. The city skyline is hazy, and the first warm breeze of summer on this late June evening wafts by more than 500 revellers sipping free martinis and beer. The women in the crowd, ranging from mid-20s to late-30s, are freshly coiffed. Clutching their Guess and Kate Spade bags, they seem giddy, exposing bare skin for perhaps the first time this year in crisp off-the-hanger dresses and halter tops. Make-up and self-tanning lotion have been liberally applied. The men, doing their best to appear stylish and aloof, admire them freely.

Right now, everyone is watching the models romp across the stage and gather near prop couches set to the platform sides, as they playfully pretend to be at a house party.

The entire Gap-sponsored "Bra & Panty Party" fashion show takes about 15 minutes, but no one in the hip professional scene is prepared for the bodacious finale. A voluptuous woman bounds on stage in little white underwear and a tank top. She whisks off her top to reveal a fanciful set of pasties. The crowd is wowed.

It's Sasha, the relationship columnist at the Toronto weekly entertainment newspaper *eye*.

She's up on stage because she wanted to make a statement, since her aunt had just undergone a double mastectomy. In fact, everyone at the party was there to support the breast cancer cause. The event was one of a spring series of fundraisers put on by a fledgling Toronto-based charity called Rethink Breast Cancer. Like Sasha, the organization is making a strong statement with its audience—primarily young women, but men also, who typically feel estranged from the cause.

Rethink, as its name says, is rethinking how to raise awareness of breast cancer prevention and to raise funds for research. Rejecting the typical non-profit tendency to put resources behind administration and fundraising first, MJ (Mary-Jo) DeCoteau, executive director, and Alison Gordon-Farber, director of marketing and communications, have put their priority on branding and marketing communications. The two of them aren't selling a cause, they're marketing a brand that is the cause. Rethink is accessible and relevant to target audiences with its chic fundraising parties, tactical sponsorship choices and über-fresh and stylish brand image.

It's a strategy that some contend is the only way to reach today's largely untapped future donor: offspring of the baby boomers, a media-

savvy and skeptical bunch who are highly resistant to tug-on-the-heartstrings advertising.

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DeCoteau, 32, has a personal stake in finding a cure for breast cancer. Although her grandmother recovered from the disease, she lost her mother to it 10 years ago. While researching her own risk factors a few years later, she began volunteering at the Canadian Breast Cancer Society. There, she launched a small Toronto chapter and held a few successful fundraising events. The society offered her a paid position when she was 28.

"I loved it. I was having a great time. My whole approach was that everything I'd seen about the breast cancer cause seemed to be medical, or appeal to an older mainstream audience.

"I was 22 when my mom passed away, and obviously that was a life-changing experience," she continues. "But at the same time, I still loved fashion, film and music. I grew up watching *Seinfeld* and *Friends*. And I wanted to find ways to give back to the cause that related back to my daily life." She felt she could reach her demo through channels that interested her, such as entertainment, fashion and beauty.

She approached Zig in January 2000 about doing a pro bono public service ad (PSA). She'd read

about its co-creative directors Elspeth Lynn and Lorraine Tao, and admired their past work, including award-winning breakthrough ads for Special K and Fruit of the Loom. "They are very smart. Female-savvy," DeCoteau says. "I went in expecting this big power meeting, and they were so amazing. So humble and honoured."

They pitched her what became a legendary PSA: "Cam's Breast Exam." This TV spot featured a pubescent boy urging women to call his toll-free line to get a free breast exam, since so many of them can't find the time to do it themselves.

Cam, with his sweaty palms and sexual innuendo, didn't amuse everyone. The spot ran for about six weeks on MuchMusic in the fall of 2000. A few days before it aired, a story about it ran in the *Toronto Star* and both Zig and the Society were flooded with calls from people who, though they hadn't seen the ad, complained that its use of humour trivialized the disease. And the day after it aired, Zig and the Society were booked solid with media interviews.

Says Lynn: "I remember leaning over to Lorraine, saying, 'You know what? This is why I believe, with hand on heart, you have to know you are doing the right thing. If you don't and you See *BRANDING A CAUSE*, page 8

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are accosted by the media, you would just crumble.'

"Cam" was a shot of tongue-in-cheek humour that attempted to evoke in women a sense of responsibility over their own breast health. And DeCoteau, the Society and Zig knew the choice to go with "Cam" was risky.

"That's why I admire MJ," says Lynn. "Because for her it is about taking risks and it is about doing the right thing for a part of the population." It's that edgy attitude that resonates with DeCoteau's target demographic, says Sarah Crawford, vice-president of public affairs at Chum TV, owners of MuchMusic, the only channel to run the spot.

"(DeCoteau) is a very passionate,

courageous, intelligent woman with a real understanding of her audience. I was really struck with how she was able to position the work of the Society and the issue of breast cancer for a MuchMusic audience." Crawford adds that Much received only two complaints, both from people outside the target.

"When it aired, it was crazy," says DeCoteau, who fielded calls at the Society, and who actually didn't mind the publicity one bit. She had unwavering confidence in the spot, as she does now

with Rethink, contending that the focus is tackling a serious issue, breast cancer, in a positive and upbeat way. "Obviously it is serious, and probably a disease most women fear the most. And

DeCoteau left the Society at the end of 2000, partly because it was restructuring and mostly because "Cam" had solidified in her mind the foundation for a new organization. "I just think there are

we are trying to cut through that fear."

"Cam's Breast Exam" was lauded this spring by MediaWatch in its fourth annual report. The Vancouver-based non-profit organization is dedicated to improving the portrayal of women and girls in the media.

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Now DeCoteau and Gordon-Farber, 30, are housed rent-free in a tiny but cozy office, unused space that Zig donated at its office in downtown Toronto. Lynn and Tao believe ad agencies should establish more long-term commitments with non-profit organizations. Says Lynn: "The trouble with PSA work is that most agencies will do one spot a year. They do a kind of one-off, as opposed to thinking about the whole brand.

"What's so great about Rethink," she adds, "is we are here at the beginning with MJ. So we are able to start from the core of what she wanted the organization to be. It's more of a pure branding exercise."

Zig helped DeCoteau create Rethink's identity when its doors opened in March 2001, designing its logo of circles in different flesh tones to represent the indiscriminate proliferation of the disease, as well as various support materials in the shape of a breast. Rethink also distributes "The Big Bam! self-exam," a lively brochure from the New York-based Big Bam! Foundation, an organization started by Janice Bonadio, who was struck with breast cancer at 27. The Rethink brand's overall tone is charming, vivacious and in vogue, without a hint of pretension.

DeCoteau and Gordon-Farber, who left Zig as an account planner to join Rethink last October, spent much of last year building the brand and landing corporate sponsors. DeCoteau is now focusing on fundraising and aims to raise \$500,000 this year and, within five years, \$5 million annually.

While both the young and outgoing women say they recognize and highly respect the work done by other breast cancer organizations, they want to engage the younger demographic who live with the disease: 22% of Canadian women diagnosed with breast cancer are under 40, and many women that age are living with affected mothers, grandmothers, aunts or sisters.

Rethink's official mandate is to fund innovative breast cancer research by providing seed funding for high-impact projects and new and upcoming researchers, while working to transform attitudes toward the cause.

Crawford says MuchMusic is very eager to work with Rethink in the future because it is strongly branded in a really youth-friendly way. "Every group in the country that tries to reach a youth audience comes to us," says Crawford, who is responsible for handling non-profit proposals at Chum TV. "We do think it is important, if the message is really going to be heard, and if it is going to sink in and be actionable with our audience, that it has got to be told clearly and in a way that makes them listen."

Critics contend that too often PSAs give rise to a sense of condolence rather than empowerment, with politically correct and clichéd posturing and symbols. Lynn, who says many PSA logos are bad type treatments "with some silly illustration behind it," recalls at least one ad on breast cancer that, with its superficial approach, alienated her from the cause instead of drawing her in.

Crawford thinks most PSAs need to work to break through the clutter, adding that it's a mistake for non-profits *not* to focus on marketing and branding. "Obviously, you can't focus on it to the exclusion to all other activities. But people underestimate the importance of it."



A stylishly irreverent brochure offers useful advice on breast self-examination

Shelley Smith, a consultant at youth research firm D-Code in Toronto, says non-profits also need to go after Rethink's demographic: the Nexus Generation of people 18 to 34. "Certainly charitable giving increases with age, but the sense of connection to causes is not the same as it was a generation ago," she says. "It's a different reality and short-sighted for organizations to not now begin to connect with (Nexus)."

Research shows the Nexus group has \$104 billion in disposable income (not far behind the \$140 billion for people 35 to 50), and 68% of them already donate to charities. "We are looking at what could be a potentially influential donor group," Smith contends. However, the group does not reach a connection with social causes through the same routes as boomers do, such as community or religious associations. "(Nexus) looks for community through peer groups, and social outlets, and in a more hands-on, direct action way," says Smith.

ments in Canada, it receives from 15 to 25 requests per week. But it rejects most of them, being highly selective with sponsorship choices. Says Jane Shaw, senior manager of public relations at Gap in Toronto, "It's rare that we find a non-profit that focuses on its brand as much as we do, and it was a nice partnership between the two brands, where Rethink's ideas are innovative and fresh. They keep the brand simple; it really matched up nicely with our brand philosophy."

The Rethink promotion marks the first time Gap in Canada has run another brand's promotional materials in-store. A print ad in *Fashion* announced a promotion where Gap donated to Rethink \$1 from each bra purchased from June 22 to July 22.

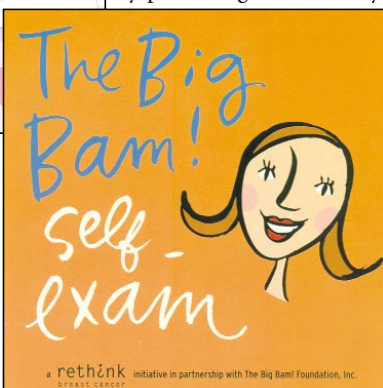
"We are very careful with our brand," says Shaw. However, she explains, "they (Rethink) have a very strong understanding of the role of the brand. And more important, they are approaching

education around this cause in a different way, and really speaking to a different group of people."

Rethink shows no signs of sidetracking brand building. In fact, Gordon-Farber recently pulled together a heavy-



Rethink Breast Cancer stages chic fundraisers like a Gap-sponsored "Bra & Panty Party" at a Toronto nightclub (above) and distributes a lively brochure from New York called "The Big Bam! self-exam"



At the same time, she explains, "This group has grown up with marketing appeals from organizations, and they are able to read through the signs. And the heartstrings approach is very disempowering. Rethink's positive, action-oriented approach engages this group."

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Rethink is certainly engaging normally hard-to-get sponsors. In its first few months, it pulled off a major coup in partnering with the very choosy international organization Fashion Targets Breast Cancer, bringing it to Canada for the first time last September. Launched in 1994 by the U.S. fashion industry, the group tries to align itself with similarly edgy organizations in other countries. So far it has raised, through sales of the fashion designer Target T-shirts, \$20 million in countries including the U.S., Australia, Brazil, Greece and the U.K. Rethink worked with *Fashion Magazine* and Holt Renfrew for last fall's launch event, and raised an estimated pro bono media reach valued at an enormous \$35 million. Target is a biennial event in Canada, and Rethink will handle another event in 2003.

Rethink recently landed Revlon as the launch sponsor of its Web site at www.rethinkbreastcancer.com. For last month's kickoff, Revlon agreed to give Rethink \$1 for each of the first 5,000 people who sign up for a monthly breast self-exam e-mail from Rethink. Respondents are automatically entered to win a basket of its new Skinlights makeup line.

Gap readily agreed to sponsor Rethink's fundraising parties this June in Vancouver and Toronto (Rethink holds sets of fundraisers in the spring and the fall). While Gap commits to other non-profit sponsorship arrange-

weight list of ad folk to sit on a marketing advisory board that met for the first time a few months ago. It includes Rob Guenette, president of Flavour; Wendy Herman, VP and general manager at W Network; Jane Shaw at Gap; and Margaret Cooper, director of marketing at Yorkdale Shopping Centre in Toronto.

And Zig has put a creative team to work on Rethink's first television PSA, slotted to run this fall. While details of the brief were not disclosed, if Rethink remains true to its brand position, the spot will likely grab attention. "Whatever we do, we will be trying to add something new to the field," says DeCoteau.

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A few weeks later, the Gap store on Toronto's Bloor Street is hopping. It's lunch hour, and as I enter a change room and slip on one of the bras I've come to buy, the funky beat of singer Macy Gray puts me in the mood for dancing plans this weekend. I check the bra's comfort factor and conduct the final test: Is it flattering?

As I do another once-over and decide on the basic black, it does occur to me that I rarely check my breasts for lumps. Heading back to the office, I feel guilty about that, and mull over one of several TV concepts that Zig presented to DeCoteau two years ago. The gist of it was about getting your priorities straight when it comes to your breasts. Worry about lumps, then the lift and lace.

Then, as I do from time to time, I fondly recall Cam, with his innocent and so obviously desperate appeal to call his toll-free line. And it makes me chuckle, before I take a deep breath and make a mental note to conduct a self-exam tonight.