

# BRANDED MALE

MARKETING  
TO MEN



Mark Tungate

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Mark Tungate



London and Philadelphia

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# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

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## The Trigger

This book began with a shirt. A blue cotton chambray shirt – a little better cut than most, but otherwise perfectly ordinary. When I tried it on, however, I found that the sleeves were too long. Before I could fold back the offending cuffs, the saleswoman was at my side. ‘They’re all like that now,’ she told me. ‘It’s the motorcycle cut.’ I looked slantwise at her: *the motorcycle cut*? She extended her arms. ‘When you’re on a motorbike you reach forward, like this, and the sleeves ride up. Guys tell us they like the sleeves cut a bit longer, so they look good when they’re on their bikes.’

I extended my own arms and canted forward as if riding an invisible motorcycle. She was right: the sleeves suddenly fit perfectly.

I didn’t believe a word of the woman’s sales patter – but I thought it was a stroke of genius. Her explanation for the long sleeves seemed to encapsulate all the best techniques for marketing to today’s man: the practicality, the attention to detail, the suggestion of a dandyish sense of style combined with a hint of rugged machismo – we were talking *motorbikes*, after all – topped off with an appeal to a faint streak of peacock vanity.

Reader, I bought that shirt. And it began the train of thought that led to the book you’ve just opened.

## THE MANIFOLD MALE

Men are not what they were. Year after year, in article after article, we're told that a new type of man is abroad. His names vary, but certain common characteristics appear each time. He is more sensitive than his predecessors. He is more nurturing, more interested in looking good and – the real point of the message that is being drummed in to us – a lot keener on shopping.

This creature has been with us at least since the 1980s, when glossy magazine journalists dubbed him The New Man. Later he transmogrified into New Lad – who was simply New Man with some of Old Man's nasty habits. And then he evolved into the marketers' ultimate dreamboat: the metrosexual. Here, at last, was the ideal guy. A man who was obsessed with his appearance; who did not hesitate to invest in designer clothes and expensive skincare products; a man who joined designer gyms and lavish spas; a man who was plucked, buffed, toned, tanned and polished to perfection. We didn't hear much about what he read or watched or listened to – we were just told that he consumed.

The term 'metrosexual' was coined – or at least put into print – by the British writer Mark Simpson. His original article appeared in *The Independent* newspaper on 15 November 1994. (The full version can be found on his website, [www.marksimpson.com](http://www.marksimpson.com).) The piece refers to an exhibition called 'It's A Man's World', an exhibition of male-oriented brands organized by the British edition of the style magazine *GQ*. Simpson seizes on this as evidence of a new breed of male. 'Traditionally heterosexual men were the world's worst consumers,' he writes. 'All they bought was beer, fags and the occasional Durex, the Wife or Mum bought everything else. In a consumerist world, heterosexual men had no future. So they were replaced by the metrosexual.'

The 1996 shopping list of the metrosexual was as follows: 'Davidoff "Cool Water" aftershave (the one with the naked bodybuilder on the beach), Paul Smith jackets (Ryan Giggs wears

them), corduroy shirts (Elvis wore them), chinos (Steve McQueen wore them), motorcycle boots (Marlon Brando wore them), Calvin Klein underwear (Marky Mark wears nothing else). Metrosexual man is a commodity fetishist: a collector of fantasies about the male sold to him by advertising.'

If the metrosexual sounded suspiciously like a homosexual, this was no coincidence. 'Metrosexuality was of course, test-marketed on gay men – with enormous success... It was in the style-obsessed Eighties that the "gay lifestyle" – the single man living in the metropolis and taking himself as his own love-object – became an aspiration for non-homosexuals.'

Duly noted and catalogued, the metrosexual returned for a while to his natural habitat: the pages of men's magazines. But Simpson was surprised in 2003 when he saw 'an American "trendspotter" popping up on telly and in the papers talking excitedly about this exciting new man she'd discovered called a "metrosexual"'. The woman was Marian Salzman, then chief strategy officer at the advertising agency Euro RSCG Worldwide. The agency's report on metrosexuality and marketing to men was making headlines around the world. Salzman – as she fully acknowledged – had updated and commercialized the metrosexual, using him as an avatar for a new, marketing-friendly male. No longer always single, he nonetheless embraced some of the consumption habits that had previously been the preserve of gay men – or of women.

Aided by Salzman's promotional prowess, this far less edgy, infinitely more appealing figure captured the imaginations of journalists, who spilled gallons of ink about him in an outpouring of what Simpson called 'metrosexualmania'. The soccer star David Beckham was inevitably cited as the poster boy for metrosexuality – a married sporting hero who was perfectly at ease with his off-duty role as a fashion icon. Brought forward as further evidence of the metrosexual's existence was the US TV series *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, in which straight men gratefully accepted grooming and lifestyle tips from a troupe



of gay advisers. Suddenly, the metrosexual had entered popular culture.

I emailed Simpson and asked him how he'd felt about this at the time. He wrote back: 'The marketing fervour around the metrosexual, which began after I introduced him to the US on Salon.com in 2002 [in a piece called "Meet the metrosexual"], appeared to be about selling him to women, not to men. Hence the one doing the selling was a woman herself; hence the way she went on about him "being in touch with his feminine side" and "such a great dad and husband", and that his interest in his appearance was "to please women".'

For Simpson, this interpretation of the metrosexual cast a blind eye over his essential narcissism and turned him into 'New Man' revisited. 'In other words, the marketing version of the metrosexual was too goody-goody to be true. Or be very desirable either. In fact, there is nothing essentially feminine or women-pleasing about metrosexuality at all. Vanity's name is not Woman.'

But the worst part of it, in Simpson's view, was that this distilled version seemed to negate one of the positive achievements of metrosexuality, which was to liberate men from their mothers and wives. 'Metrosexuality actually gives men a certain amount of independence from women: after all, they can actually choose their own clothes, operate a washing machine, and maybe even cook their own food. Whereas the retrosexual depended on women to mother him, the metrosexual mothers himself.'

Both the media and the marketers who had adopted him soon grew tired of the metrosexual. This was in part because he didn't click with consumers. It was a great buzzword, but there were too few metrosexuals in the real world, and even the men who fit into the category didn't like to think of themselves that way. They were just normal guys who used moisturizer and hair gel. In 2006, a study by the advertising agency Leo Burnett Worldwide estimated that only one-fifth of the US population could truly be

placed in the ‘metrosexual’ bracket. And the others didn’t aspire to joining them. When male consumers were asked by a Harris poll to name their role models, the top ten responses included Clint Eastwood, Sean Connery and John Wayne (‘Metrosexual mortality’, *Media Week*, 4 September 2006).

Clearly an alternative had to be found. One option was the ‘retrosexual’ – essentially Old Man in all his red-blooded splendour. Watching sport, hanging out with the guys, chucking a steak on the barbecue, chugging beer and letting the stubble sprout at weekends – he was realistic, all right, but not particularly interesting. And certainly not what marketers wanted to hear about.

Fortunately, it looked as though Marian Salzman had come to the rescue again with the übersexual, her latest take on modern masculinity. Now executive vice-president of the advertising agency J. Walter Thompson, she had published a book called *The Future of Men* (2005), along with her colleagues Ira Matathia and Ann O’Reilly. In its pages she suggested that certain men might combine the best of both archetypes – the traditional male values of the retrosexual with the well-groomed stylishness of the metro. ‘Compared with the metrosexual, the übersexual is more into relationships than self,’ she wrote. ‘He dresses for himself more than others (choosing a consistent personal style over fashion fads). Like the metrosexual, the übersexual enjoys shopping, but his approach is more focused; he shops for particular items that enhance his collection rather than shopping as entertainment (he has better things to do than hang out at the mall).’

Once again, we didn’t learn a great deal about this latest man’s cultural preferences – but at least he still liked shopping. Somehow, though, after an initial flurry of headlines, Herr Über didn’t really catch on. Mark Simpson believes this is because he was an adaptation of – rather than a replacement for – the metrosexual. Actually, he was a middle-aged metrosexual. And members of the public, when they referred to a certain type of image-conscious man, still insisted on using the original term.

‘That might be because the public is stupid; or it might be because metrosexual actually refers to something observable, it has a sociological or anthropological value – rather than just marketing spin.’ Amusingly, Simpson adds a final volley averring that the ‘replacement’ terms were attempts by marketers to take the gay, narcissistic edge off metrosexuality: ‘Ooh! Suits you, sir! So stylish, but not at all vain! No! And really buffed, but not at all gay! Ooh! Heaven forfend, sir!’

## **MEN WITHOUT WOMEN – AND VICE VERSA**

Away from all the semantics, though, what is really going on with men? The truth is that they are different, simply and obviously because society is different. What happened to men, of course, was feminism. A generation of men came home to supper to find that not only was it not on the table, but that the house was empty. Women were still at work, or had decided not to marry after all. Or they had decided to marry much later, leaving men kicking their heels well into their late twenties. Either way, women’s assertion of choice had deprived men of their previously clear-cut roles as fathers and breadwinners.

Exploring the vacant rooms of this unfamiliar dwelling, men slowly came to terms with the situation. If women didn’t need them as much, maybe that represented a kind of freedom for them, too? Young men who had watched their fathers going through divorces – or collapsing from heart attacks in a welter of overwork and suburban repression – began to wonder if the old archetype was really that attractive in the first place. Others came from single-parent families and had little confidence in the traditional domestic structure. Why not experiment, play the field, take advantage of cheap travel, see if they couldn’t get along on their own? ‘A gap between the end of adolescence and the onset of adulthood has appeared in a man’s early to mid-20s, a period in which no traditional markers of manhood apply and income is almost entirely disposable. These men are left to piece together a

male identity armed only with their wallets' ('Man vs. man: did marketing kill the great American Alpha Male?', *Advertising Age*, 13 June 2005). The scene was set, then, for the emergence of the metrosexual.

Soon, though, events took a new turn. Although women had established their right to work, many of them naturally decided that they would also like a supportive partner, and a family. It was time to look for Mr Right. The problem was that, by now, Mr Right was paragliding in the Himalayas, or sitting in his bachelor pad playing video games, or at the gym getting himself toned up for another night on the town. He wasn't ready to lavish all that disposable income on a wife and kids – not just yet. The inability of women in their thirties to find a suitable, responsible man provoked the emergence in popular culture of 'singletons' like Bridget Jones and Carrie from *Sex in the City*.

At the same time, men began wondering whether, having adapted to a gender-neutral society, they hadn't relinquished too much of their masculine heritage – throwing the man, so to speak, out with the bathwater. They weren't at all sure they wanted to emulate the fey, silken-jawed figures they now saw on cinema and television screens – or pouting down at them from advertising billboards. Lacking role models in the real world, they became fascinated by classic celluloid representations of masculinity: the Bogarts and the Waynes, the Eastwoods and the McQueens.

Soon, movies and advertising began to follow their drift. Masculinity re-emerged with a touch of 21st century irony and a dash of metro-inspired sensitivity. The new James Bond – as portrayed by Daniel Craig – was an altogether craggier and more brutal incarnation than his predecessor, but he allowed himself to fall in love with his female companion. Bond's rival for action movie supremacy was Jason Bourne (Matt Damon) – the amnesiac assassin from *The Bourne Identity* (2002) and its sequels. With his sharp crew-cut, laconic dialogue and impressive martial arts skills, Bourne is not remotely feminized; yet he is also vulnerable

and conflicted. Bruce Willis returned in 2007 for another of the *Die Hard* films, in which he plays no-nonsense cop. In *Live Free or Die Hard*, he spends most of the film trying to save his daughter. The rugged features of British actor Clive Owen appeared on print ads for Lancôme skincare products. And it seems unfair not to mention George Clooney, who with his silvery hair and elegant suits is a polished version of the iconic male – a throwback to matinee idols of the past.

These figures reflected the self-exploration that was going on in the real world. In fact, it often resembled a backlash. Examining the destiny of men in his 2006 book, *Manliness*, Harvard professor of government Harvey C. Mansfield put his cards firmly on the table. ‘Manliness is still around, and we still find it attractive,’ he asserted. ‘[C]onsider the evidence for manliness in social psychology and evolutionary biology, which show as best they can that the stereotypes of men and women are basically correct... Manliness favours war, likes risk, and admires heroes... Manliness is sometimes vulnerable and fragile but doesn’t care to admit human weaknesses.’ His book was emphatically black-and-white, right down to the cover. Women, he argued, still wanted manly men. Men may not have been perfect, but they endured. Then one imagines him sitting back and waiting for the indignant emails to fly.

And yet, responses from both men and women tended toward the dismissive. Mansfield was a ‘conservative’ – what could you expect? ‘Mansfield seems stuck in a semantic time warp,’ commented *The New York Times* (‘Who’s the man?’, 19 March 2006). But Mansfield’s book was relevant precisely *because* it was old-fashioned. The disinterring of old-school masculinity was well underway. Lori Borgman, who wrote a syndicated column for Knight Ridder newspapers, had reacted savagely to a 2005 book by Maureen Dowd, called *Are Men Necessary?*. ‘There are a lot of things I sometimes think I’d like to be, but a man is never one of them. Talk about a group maligned, vilified and marginalized. For the most part...men are stand-up guys. They work hard. They

create, tinker, build, engineer and achieve. They take carping, criticizing and complaining on the chin, and rarely get the thanks they deserve. Last year in our nation, 1.5 million babies were born out of wedlock. These children have no “man of the house”, no dad who wants to marry mom...Are men necessary? Very much so. It is a tragedy we have spent so long telling them they weren’t.’ (‘Yes...men are necessary’, 2 December 2005.)

Other articles appeared suggesting that women did not, after all, desire men who looked prettier than they did. Many men were undoubtedly cheered by this news – particularly those who’d thought of themselves as ‘old-school’ all along. When I mentioned the subject of this book to a fifty-something acquaintance, he said, ‘Just tell advertising agencies to stop portraying us as Photoshopped buffoons.’ Always happy to pick up on a trend, the media began talking of a ‘renaissance’. Perhaps there was a place for old-fashioned masculinity in a gender-neutral society. Maybe we could have our moisturizer and our power drills too.

## **WHAT LIES AHEAD**

As I walked out of the store with the bag containing my new shirt, I began to turn this state of affairs over in my mind. Was the metrosexual really a myth, or had men become rampant consumers? Should advertisers try to appeal to traditional masculinity, or some new, evolved form of manliness? Weren’t, in fact, all men different – depending on their age, their status, and even the hour of the day? What attitudes, if any, did they all have in common? What were the triggers that motivated men to buy?

Coincidentally, my interest was further piqued by a telephone call from Margaret Jobling, who had just taken charge of men’s grooming brands at Unilever. She, too, was interested in finding out what made men tick as consumers. I felt the most sensible way of doing that would be to take several male-oriented brands and look at their marketing strategies, in the hope of spotting

similarities among those that worked best. I was also keen to find out how brands had adapted to men's transformed lifestyles and attitudes.

As I didn't want to concentrate purely on fashion and skincare – the two areas, arguably, in which men's consumption patterns have changed the most – I decided to take a day in the life of a man and find out how he engaged with brands at different stages of his journey. To entertain myself (and hopefully you, too) I decided to open each chapter with a snapshot of a fictional 'branded male'. He is a caricature – but not entirely. Some of his habits are my own, some have been stolen from friends, and others still were gleaned from the marketers I interviewed for the main text.

While recounting his adventures, though, I was well aware that my branded male hailed from a very narrow segment of society. Many men, I am sure, are immune to constant exhortations to consume. Before I'd even begun the first chapter, I received the following email from my father. In it he described himself as 'one of the oldest branded males on the planet'. He continued, 'The fragrance I'm wearing is a heady blend of liniment, Old Spice and Savlon, mixed with the aroma of garden compost and car polish. My clothes closely resemble the ones I wore in 1978, 1988 and 1998: surely Fair Isle cardigans and flannel slacks will come back into fashion soon?'

He was only partly joking. This, dear readers, is what you are up against. But don't despair – on the next page you'll meet a considerably more willing male consumer.

# Skin

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## Scene One: The Bathroom

The shelf below his bathroom mirror is a battlefield. Occasionally he tries to blame his girlfriend, but the truth is that half the items fighting for territory on the strip of zinc are his. The ranks of grey, white and black vessels resemble advancing chess pieces. Their provenance is mysterious: he wouldn't be able to tell you exactly when Kiehl's Blue Herbal Astringent Lotion and Clarins Active Face Wash insinuated themselves into his morning routine. Not to mention Clinique M Lotion and American Crew Classic Wax. He certainly didn't rush out and buy them all at once. It was a slow accretion; a steady assault on his subconscious until each of these products seemed essential. It hardly seems possible that there was a time when a razor, foam, water and soap would have sufficed, followed by a quick blast of deodorant.

He hits the shower, sloughing off the dead skin cells – invisible to the eye, but the magazines assure him that they exist – with an exfoliating scrub from Kiehl's. Then he washes with Anthony Logistics Shower Gel. After that, his hair gets the treatment with Kérastase Frequent Use Shampoo, 'to help reduce the risk of hair loss', because he's 35 and you can't be too careful. When he's rinsed out the shampoo, he applies a sneaky lick of his girlfriend's Garnier Fructis Fortifying Conditioner. The French



on the packaging nudges him into thinking about his business trip to Paris later that day.

The conditioner follows the shampoo down the drain and he cuts the water, stepping onto the bathmat.

He's not out of the bathroom yet, though. Turning to the overcrowded shelf once again, he selects Biotherm Homme Sensitive Skin Shaving Foam. And then he reaches for his razor. This is a thing of beauty: an old-fashioned 'safety' razor of the type his grandfather once used. It was a gift from his girlfriend, and after a few nasty incidents early on – beads of blood appearing at his Adam's apple – he's learned to handle it with aplomb.

Like many men of his generation, he started out using an electric razor in imitation of his father. But he never really liked its hot buzzing against his skin, and so he switched to a blade. Until recently, he used the Gillette Sensor Excel with two blades. He was about to upgrade to the triple-bladed Gillette Mach3 Turbo when his birthday came along, and with it a step back into shaving history. The supposedly primitive – yet undeniably masculine – safety razor has a snobbish appeal. Indeed, he scoffed at the recent news that Gillette was launching a razor with no less than *five* blades. He remains on the Gillette marketing radar, however, as the rectangular blades he buys for the safety razor are still made by the company.

After he's finished shaving, he applies the Kiehl's astringent to the couple of nicks he's picked up. Then he moisturises with the Clinique lotion – which beneath its urbane silver-grey livery is little different to the brand's moisturizer for women. The final touch is a dab of Hugo Boss Baldessarini aftershave, once again chosen by his girlfriend. He fixes his hair with the American Crew Classic Wax, aiming for a carefully dishevelled look.

He peers critically at himself in the mirror. There are dark, faintly puffy rings under his eyes, the result of long hours at a computer

screen and one pint too many in the pub last night. Frowning, he selects a tube of Nickel Eye Contour Lift from the shelf and gingerly applies it.

His conditioning is almost total.

## THE GROOMING CONUNDRUM

Although our hero is not unique, male personal care is a far smaller sector than the beauty industry would like it to be. In 2005, market analyst Datamonitor predicted that sales of grooming products for men in Europe and the United States would grow from US\$31.6 billion in 2003 to nearly US\$40 billion in 2010. The women's beauty industry is already estimated to be worth around US\$100 billion worldwide (Future Body Visions Summit, 20–21 September 2006). If men are beginning to rival women in the vanity stakes, it seems they're still nervous about putting their wallets where their wrinkles are.

Another research group, Mintel, said starkly in a 2006 report: 'Men's toiletries have failed to achieve the explosive growth anticipated since the late 1980s, when... manufacturer Shulton launched its Insignia men's range, the first integrated line offering men top-to-toe grooming options. This was supposed to herald the emergence of the New Man, but the reality was that most men were not ready to embrace the concept of a multi-product grooming regime. Instead, it has been a much longer and slower process, highlighting the reality that men will never adopt the levels of interest and investment in the toiletries industry that is fuelling the women's beauty industry.' (Men's Toiletries UK, March 2006.) Nonetheless, the market is growing. Yet another researcher, Euromonitor, claims that the total UK market for men's grooming products – including fragrances and basics like soap and shampoo – rose by 33.2 per cent between 2001 and 2006.