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What's in Your Closet?

A company that found success with advertising that had been focused on its products is, yes, cleaning out the closets, tossing that approach for one centered on fashion and the lifestyles of its customers.



The closets reference is apt because the company is California Closets, considered the country's leading seller of home-storage systems. The category continues to grow as Americans continue to stuff their ever-bigger houses with ever-bigger quantities of consumer goods. Not surprisingly, that means California Closets now faces competitors that also seek to build closets, shelves, drawers and other storage features in homes and apartments.

So after more than a decade of campaigns concentrating on the storage systems that are custom-built for customers, California Closets is changing over to ads that celebrate the diverse lives

- and possessions - of the people who order those products. The new campaign, with a budget estimated at \$4 million, is being created internally.

The ads are making their debut in a long list of magazines. An image from one ad is also appearing on the home page of the company's Web site (calclosets.com).

"The category has become more crowded, more mature," says Edward Leaman, executive vice president at California Closets in San Rafael, Calif., which meant it became time to "separate the brand from the product."

"It's not about us," he adds. "It's about your world, us meeting your need."

Rather than run ads depicting only the storage systems, as the company previously did, the new ads feature photographs of models showing how the storage systems can be used in closets, home offices, pantries and other parts of the home.

"You're represented by what you have in your home," Mr. Leaman says, adding: "Your home houses the people you love and the things you love. You really are your treasures and your memories."

The models were selected to represent a broad range of living situations and reflect that the California Closets target market extends from ages 30 to 65, Mr. Leaman says. On the younger end, they are buyers of first homes, while on the older end, they are empty-nesters remodeling their homes or moving to smaller homes.

In one ad, a young woman, bearing a resemblance in profile to Paris Hilton, stands inside a closet chock-full of clothing and enough shoes to shod the Carrie Bradshaw character for several potential sequels to "Sex and the City."

In a second ad, an Asian-American woman is seated in her living room, gazing at a hand of cards. Behind her are shelves filled with oversized vases and other glass objets d'art.

In a third ad, a handsome young man dressed in contrasting stripes kneels near his well-organized clothes and shoes as he fills a striped overnight bag with sweaters. The ad seems to suggest that he is in the closet only when he needs a new outfit.

A fourth ad presents a couple, embracing as they stand in front of shelves of dishes, pots, cooking equipment and a wine rack crowded with bottles. They are dressed to suggest they may be chefs.

A fifth ad, the one that also appears on the home page, shows an older man pensively posed at the desk of his well-appointed home office. A sixth ad shows an older woman, also pensive, staring at a sculpture in her art studio.

The ads are all awash in strong colors "as an apparel brand would do," Mr. Leaman says, to play up the association with fashion and lifestyle. The California Closets logo appears in a color matching the rest of each ad.

To further underscore the fashion and lifestyle elements, the ads were shot by a New York fashion photographer, Baldomero Fernandez, whose work has appeared in magazines like Details and Essence as well as in ads for I.B.M. and Macy's. The stylist for the photos, Sarah Gore-Reeves, is also known for her work for magazines like Hint and Ocean Drive.

In addition to the shelter magazines that have long been on the California Closets media schedule, the company is adding magazines that cover food and travel as well as those read by gay men and lesbians. The list of publications includes Architectural Digest, Gourmet, Martha Stewart Living, Metropolitan Home, Real Simple, Saveur, Traditional Home and Town & Country.

Plans call for television commercials next year, Mr. Leaman says, as well as ads online, adding that "the Web is becoming incredibly important" for the company as 30 percent to 35 percent of consultation requests are arriving through the Web site.