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Would You Buy Underwear By Subscription?

The CEOs of Tommy Bahama and Bonobos weigh in on Manpacks's plan to sell men's underwear subscriptions.

By [Shivani Vora](#) | Oct 1, 2010

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Macho Mail Manpacks shipments include boxers, briefs, or boxer briefs.

Ken Johnson and Andrew Draper are on a mission to save the world's men from worn-out underpants. "When guys buy these basics, they hang on to them forever, and it's usually our mothers, wives, and girlfriends who replenish them," Johnson says. In January, Johnson and Draper launched Manpacks, a Providence-based company that sells men's underwear, socks, and undershirts on a subscription basis. Men sign up to get a delivery of new undergarments every three months. Each pack costs about \$14 to \$70, depending on the number of items and the brands customers order. So far, 500 people have subscribed. Johnson and Draper hope to make Manpacks the go-to service for men who don't want to have to think about shopping for the basics. To that end, Manpacks has promoted its services mostly through social networking sites and online ads. The company has also received mentions in *Maxim* and *The New York Times* and on several blogs. How can Manpacks get more guys to try mail-order underwear? We asked four entrepreneurs to weigh in.

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NO. 1: Target women

Clint Greenleaf, founder of Greenleaf Book Group, an independent book publisher in Austin

The type of guy who would sign up for this service is probably the same type who would go out and buy himself underwear anyway. Manpacks could reach a larger market by going after the moms, wives, and girlfriends who buy this stuff for the men in their lives. Hire a consultant who knows the industry from the perspective of female buyers. Market to women's groups, hit up editors at women's magazines, and reach out to female bloggers who write about fashion, lifestyle, and parenting.

NO. 2: Play up the products

Andy Dunn, founder and CEO of Bonobos, an online men's clothing company based in New York City

Manpacks is heavily pushing the convenience of its service, but it also needs to market the products it's selling. The first thing visitors to the Manpacks website see is generic pictures of socks and some old-school underwear. A guy who clicks on this site doesn't get an idea of what the products are like in terms of brand or quality. Revamp the homepage to highlight the brand names as well as features like fine-grain cotton. Manpacks should also include this information in its advertising.

NO. 3: Make 'em laugh

Duncan Mitchell, CEO of Someecards.com, a New York City-based e-card site

Manpacks is trying to solve the problem of guys not going out to buy underwear and socks. It should accentuate that in a funny way. On the homepage, give men the option

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of sending their friends a quirky message about waiting so long to buy these basics. Have messages like "the hair hello" or "cheesy socks" along with illustrations of a T-shirt that has chest hair peeking out through a hole, sagging underwear, or socks full of holes like Swiss cheese. At the end of the message, pose Manpacks as the solution. Trash talking among guys is big, and using this type of locker-room humor will work well to build the brand. If the message is catchy enough, word about Manpacks will spread quickly.

NO. 4: Get aggressive

Terry Pillow, CEO of Tommy Bahama, a Seattle-based apparel company

I don't think Manpacks is the type of thing that guys are going to seek out on their own. So, Manpacks needs to find them and get in their faces. Do an aggressive direct mailing program. Partner with credit card companies, phone companies, and cable companies to insert ads inside the bills they mail to customers. The more people find out about Manpacks, the better its chance of success.

Feedback on the Feedback:

Johnson likes most of these suggestions but says Manpacks can't afford to implement some of them, such as launching a direct mail campaign and hiring a consultant. "We don't have the money to hire a consultant," he says, "but we can certainly reach out to bloggers and editors on our own." Johnson took the feedback into account in revamping the Manpacks website, but he still prefers to emphasize the service rather than the brands the company offers. Manpacks has had some success with injecting humor into its marketing message, and Johnson likes the idea of letting visitors send funny messages poking fun at their pals. "Ours is a sticky concept, so humor works well in selling it," he says. "We will look into finding ways to do that."

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