

No more dancing around issues in feminine hygiene

products, that began airing in July. / Richards Group/Associated Press

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Celebrities are gabbing about it openly. A growing number of grooming products cater to it. And a recent TV commercial hails it as “the cradle of life” and “the center of civilization.”

The vagina is becoming big business.

A generation that grew up with more graphic language and sexual images in the media is forgoing the decades-old practice of tiptoeing around female genitalia in favor of more open dialogue about it. To reach digital-age 20- and 30-somethings, who also have shortened attention spans, marketers are using ads that are edgier, more frank and sometimes downright shocking.

“Gen Y people are more relaxed about their bodies, so there’s more attention to products that people would have been embarrassed to talk about before,” says Deborah Mitchell, executive director for the Center for Brand and Product Management at the University of Wisconsin School of Business. “It’s part of this trend of women saying, ‘Hey, we’re not embarrassed to talk about this.’ ”

The new freedom to talk about the vagina comes as marketers spend more to get women to buy products for the area. Ad spending for feminine hygiene products, including tampons, panty liners and cleansers, was up nearly 30 percent to \$218.9 million in 2010 from two years ago, according to Kantar Media.

Pop culture also has a lot to do with Americans’ — and companies’ — increased comfort with women’s nether regions. The term “vajayjay” became popular after media mogul Oprah Winfrey began using it on TV in 2007. Last month, actress Olivia Wilde, who stars on the Fox TV series “House,” described her favorite vagina tattoo on TBS’s “Conan.”

“I am about to pass out,” Conan said.

The openness has spawned an industry of products and services. “Vajazzling” — gluing on sparkly gems such as Swarovski crystals to jazz up a bikini wax — became a phenomenon last year when actress Jennifer Love Hewitt mentioned it on the former TBS talk show “Lopez Tonight.” It’s now a popular service offered by some salons across the country. For instance, the Brazil Bronze Glow Bar spa in New York, charges \$25 for house designs like a butterfly, dragon and heart, and up to \$100 for custom-made designs.

Bettybeauty Inc., which makes pubic [hair](#) dye, was started by Nancy Jarecki in 2006 and sells its products at salons and beauty stores. The \$14.99 product works like normal hair dye but is formulated to be safe for the pubic area. The colors run from basics like black, brown and blonde to hot pink, turquoise and purple.

Jarecki said sales have tripled since the line was introduced, although she declined to give figures. Some women are looking to cover gray hair, while others just want a fun color, she says. “When I came out with it, there was this kind of burst of ‘Oh my god, you solved our problem. I didn’t realize how much gray hair was down there,’ ” she said.

Big consumer products companies also are rolling out products for the vagina and using frank-talking ad campaigns to pitch them.

Energizer Inc. in 2009 introduced the Schick Quattro Trimstyle Razor, which has a bikini trimmer on one side. An ad for the product, which first aired in Europe and shows women dancing to a catchy song called “Mow the Lawn” as they trim hedges,

became a viral hit online. A toned-down U.S. version of the ad shows shrubs shrinking into various designs as women walk by them — an allusion to trimming the bikini line.

Kimberly-Clark makes fun of stereotypically touchy-feely feminine products ads in its campaign for a new line of pads and tampons introduced last year and put them in brightly colored packaging. In the TV commercial, a woman says, “I want to hold really soft things, like my cat” and “sometimes I just want to run on the beach, I like to twirl, maybe in slow motion.” The commercial then closes with the line: “Why are tampon ads so ridiculous?”

In July, the company introduced a designer series that includes pads with flowers, polka dots and stripes printed on them and a limited edition pad and tampon carrying case designed by “Sex and the City” TV series stylist Patricia Field.