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STUCKEMAN SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
DEPARTMENT OF GRAPIC DESIGN

REBRANDING SEX:  
THE REDESIGN OF CONDOM BRANDING & CONSUMPTION

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for a baccalaureate degree in  
Graphic Design with honors in Graphic Design

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## **ABSTRACT**

Sex is taboo in our culture; it only occurs behind closed doors. Let's start a conversation about sexual health. The underlying expectation is that men carry condoms, and women take birth control. However clearly this arrangement isn't working, especially since hormonal contraceptives don't prevent sexually transmitted diseases. Condoms are advertised toward men, expensive and public. Sex is private, we get that.

In the recent past, and perceivable future, home delivery services are increasing. So many companies have had success outside of stores; online. Contacts, ink, tampons, vitamins, make-up, and fashion are all huge markets that have moved online to simplify and improve the customer experience. What makes them so successful? LOLA for example allows users to select and customize their own tampon box to fit each individual woman's flow. Then your subscription gets your tampons to your door each month, no problem. What's next? Condoms. Customizable, personable, comfortable, discrete, and safe; delivered to your door.

Envision a clean brand, different from all the screaming black boxes in the dreaded condom aisle. A fresh face addressing sex in a comfortable way; instead of shiny words and promises of extreme pleasure. Simple illustrations, fun, flirty patterns, tales of successful nights, tips & tricks or goofy accounts will accompany each box.

The goal of this thesis is to create a brand that gives consumers the confidence to take charge of their own sexual health and starts an open discussion about sex.

Deliverables: branding, packaging, website.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
Chapter 1 Ideologies: Brand Influence & Responsibility .....	1
Effect on the Marginalized .....	1
Chapter 2 Branding .....	4
Condoms .....	4
Case Study: Trojan Condoms .....	5
Chapter 3 Rebranding .....	8
Concept .....	8
Color and Logotype .....	9
Supportive Elements .....	11
Chapter 4 Application .....	14
Packaging Design .....	14
Web Design .....	17
Chapter 5 Summary .....	23
Process .....	23
Conclusion .....	25
Bibliography .....	26

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1-1 Portrayal of women in the media .....	3
Figure 2-1 Popular Condom Packaging .....	4
Figure 2-2 Trojan XOXO Packaging .....	6
Figure 3-1. Color Exploration .....	9
Figure 3-2 Logotype Exploration .....	10
Figure 3-3 Final Logotype .....	10
Figure 3-4 Pattern .....	12
Figure 3-5 Pattern Color Variations .....	13
Figure 3-6 Condom Icons .....	13
Figure 4-1 assure: Condom Packaging .....	15
Figure 4-2 Mailing Package .....	16
Figure 4-3 Landing Page .....	17
Figure 4-4 Landing Page: Clicked, Resulting Page .....	18
Figure 4-5 Condom Shop .....	19
Figure 4-6 Condom Shop: Original .....	20
Figure 4-7 Condom Shop: Ribbed .....	21
Figure 4-8 Condom Shop: Studded .....	22
Figure 5-1 Planning & Research .....	23
Figure 5-3 Color & Icons .....	24
Figure 5-2 Web Elements .....	24

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My fellow students, family and friends for their unwavering support, motivation, and constructive criticism.

## **Chapter 1 Ideologies: Brand Influence & Responsibility**

With the sale of a product also comes the sale of ideologies, values, images, concepts of love, sexuality and sex. Stuart Hall defines ideologies as, “images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and ‘make sense’ of some aspect of social existence” (Hall, Stuart). Sut Jhally<sup>1</sup> explains advertising is an ideological tool. He introduces a “Commodity Image System” in which products and images are tied to the pursuit of happiness and success, the sale of a product relies on advertising as an ideological tool, and value is placed on what one has, not who one is. Jhally directs *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising’s Image of Women*,” in which Jean Kilbourne explains the history of the representation of women in advertisements and the lasting effects. Only 8% of an ads images are retained by the conscious mind. The rest are maintained and processed subconsciously – creating a constructed environment in which the consumer “swims” in. More and more the citizen lives as the consumer. These ideologies sold to the public have shaped the perceptions that Assure is responding to.

### **Effect on the Marginalized**

Everyone who purchases condoms may experience discomfort at the checkout, however women and gay men have added discomfort due to the stigmas that surround their sexuality.

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Born from origins in oppression, sexual stigmas toward women and gay men began with societies objection of their sexuality.

Kilbourne explains the constant presentation of women as objects creates a climate in which there is widespread violence against women. Turning people into objects is in effect dehumanizing them. There is a theme present in advertisements that show women (typically white, thin, heavily edited women); women are shown as passive, highly feminine, fragile. In fact, there is contempt for anything considered feminine. The feminine is constantly devalued. Men are also sexualized, but they do not suffer the same negative effects: assault, rape, harassment. Men are rigidly socialized to hide certain qualities in themselves, their sexuality not being one of them. Advertisements also eroticize violence, linking sex with violence (Jhally, Sut). Men are glorified for their sexual experiences, while women are shamed. Insults arising from sexual experiences are all derogatory toward women: slut, whore, bitch. Due to this stigma, “men are more approving of sexual behaviors such as casual sex, sex without commitment, and sex with multiple partners than women were.” (Mass, Shearer and Gillen). We can assume therefore heterosexual men should be more comfortable purchasing condoms.

1,133 college aged students responded to an anonymous questionnaire posted throughout school Facebook groups regarding their purchase and use of condoms. 63% of respondents identified as women and 30% felt embarrassed or ashamed when purchasing condoms. 52% of women who use condoms do not purchase them. 35% of respondents identified as men and 21.3% felt embarrassed or ashamed when buying condoms. 96% of men who use condoms buy them. So, in reality it seems both men and women are uncomfortable shopping for condoms, more women than men, but both would prefer more privacy.



Figure 1-1 Portrayal of women in the media



## Chapter 2 Branding

Branding is the essence or starting point of any product. It determines every decision made, including: color, voice, font, structure, form, scale. This is why branding guidelines are so essential; to ensure a cohesive and consistent presentation. Typically, a strong brand stems from a narrative, or creates one. According to The Balance, a good brand will successfully: deliver the message, confirm credibility, emotionally connect target prospects with product and or service, motivate the buyer to buy, and create user loyalty(Lake).

### Condoms



Figure 2-1 Popular Condom Packaging

If we take a look at popular condom brands we can analyze the narrative being presented. Let's strip down Trojan, Skyn, and Durex. Looking at these three popular types of Trojan, Durex, and Skyn we can observe some similarities amongst the presentation of the top condom brands in the United States, as well as some differences. Beginning with the hierarchy, the logo calls the viewers' attention first; this is important for these well-known and trusted brands since their name resonates with consumers. Condom boxes are frequently vibrant colors or black, and loud, and the top brands are no different. Each uses an excessive combination of fonts (with the

exception of Skyn) at a variety of scales. This creates a chaotic hierarchy which is difficult for a consumer to quickly read and understand. Lingering in the condom aisle is something no one wants to be doing in their local drug store, decisions are made as quickly as possible without getting to absorb all the information present. With so many different voices shouting at once, even Skyn's more cohesive branding gets lost.

The taboo nature of sex in our society creates this desired privacy and secrecy. Condoms sell well in stores due to necessity, however, the consumer does not get the chance to make a completely informed decision, and many feel uncomfortable or ashamed.

### **Case Study: Trojan Condoms**

Trojan condoms are unique in the aspect that they have already responded to the exclusion of women from the target audience. However, their solution relies on idealized femininity; the creation of Trojan XOXO missed the mark. In your typical Trojan advertisement there is a male narrator, Lil' Dicky has even emerged as a spokesperson. The narrators voice is deep and dramatic, similar to an action movie commercial. One of their most recent advertisements was released early February and focused on Valentine's Day. A heavy set middle-aged man is shown groping melons, proceeded by a younger black man fondling a PlayStation remote while reading, and the last 'main character' is a classically 'nerdy' younger man seated at a table in a café sliding his chair forward as if he is humping a body beneath him. The add ends with a man and a bouquet of roses followed by a box of Trojan condoms being placed in the center of the frame on a bedside table. The narrator says "Valentine's Day is coming, get ready with Trojan Condoms." One could applaud the representation of different

types of men in the ad, however, the presented underlying suggestions are unfortunate. The actions of the men are clearly supposed to represent sexual acts, in which objects or yes, fruit, are referring to a woman's body. The continuous presentation of women as objects continues to reinforce the dehumanization of women. Also, the clear focus on men, and heterosexual men only, excludes a huge portion of the consumer market of condoms. However, this 'voice' is present throughout all of Trojan's branding. First of their called *Trojan*. An immediate reference to the ideal representation of male masculinity, a soldier, and also war and violence. The logo, a helmet enforces this perception of the brand. A huge diversion from their façade of classic masculinity, is XOXO by Trojan (Figure 2-2).

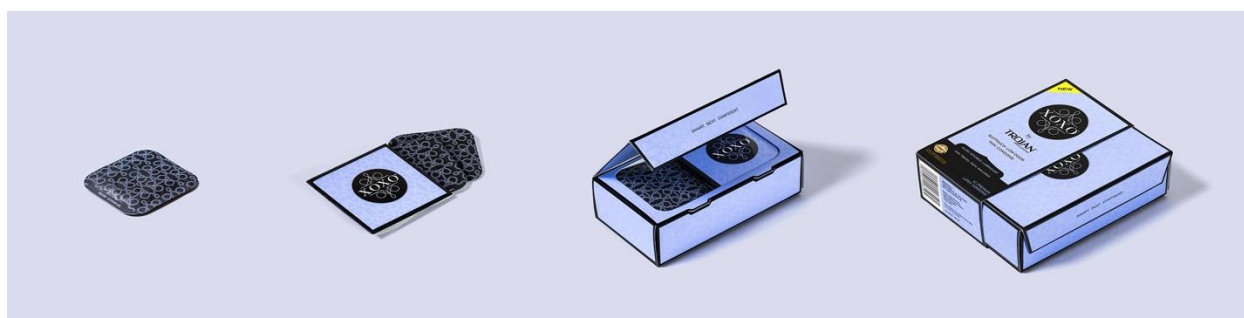


Figure 2-2 Trojan XOXO Packaging

The release of XOXO by Trojan was well planned, scheduled and thought out. However, they still miss the mark when it comes to reaching women without alienating men. Immediate observations are the reliance on classic femininity, the reduction of the brand's presence on the packaging, and the weird ass name "XOXO," kisses and hugs anyone? The package includes: individually wrapped condoms, "discrete travel pack," and a case for the two. The lilac color, serif, and looping pattern all read as very feminine. The extraneous materials seem to disregard the need for mass production. The tag-line, "trust yourself," is played upon in the advertisements. Different women going about their day are filmed in an intimate way with a voice over. The ad's goal is to encourage women to take charge of their sexual health and buy condoms they feel

comfortable buying: “trust your instincts, trust your inner voice, take care of yourself and protect yourself,” says the woman at the end of the video. This objective is a close parallel to the goal of this thesis. By acknowledging the flaws in XOXO by Trojan, a more inclusive condom brand can be formed.

## Chapter 3 Rebranding

### Concept

The stigma surrounding sex, an intimate experience, increases the demand for intimacy. Therefore, based on personal findings and perspective, supported by scholarly opinion, I initiated the rebranding of condoms, with the intent to also restructure certain societal norms and expectations surrounding sex. No one feels particularly comfortable in the condom aisle, so we're eliminating that factor. The consumer will have more time to pursue options on an online platform. Online shopping is undisputedly on the rise (Lamberton and Stephen). The ingredients in common condoms are also anything, but natural (Pradiee, O'Brien and Estes). Let's change all of that.

The brand will not exclude anyone, rather qualities the brand should exemplify are: trust, neutrality, protection, safety, intimacy, approachability. The name has to carry the mission statement. Should it arise from historical references: Cupid, Venus, Aphrodite, the story of Adam and Eve? Or from relatable connotations or language: flirtation, seduction, exploration, bang, fuck, touch? The answer lies in the brand's mission, a core part of that: honesty and simplicity. Therefore, the name arose from simply exploring Meriam Webster until the right word was found: **assure**, *to make certain, to make safe*. (The name will always be presented in all lower-case).

## Color and Logotype

Next came the exploration of color and type that would support the brand message. Without delving into the deep waters of color theory, we can graze the surface. Warm colors are proven to exemplify energy, passion and positivity. Cool colors evoke calm and professionalism. Secondary colors such as green inhibit qualities from both the warm and cool spectrum, but also carry their own associations; in this case: renewal, abundance and harmony. For **assure** the color palette and typography must be inconspicuous and approachable but exciting. The fifteen colors displayed in Figure 3-1. Color Exploration are a flexible color scheme. A wide array of colors is necessary for illustrations, differentiating products and the depth in web design. A smaller selection of colors will be chosen specifically for the logo.



Figure 3-1. Color Exploration

Keeping in mind the actual use of the product, typographic logo explorations ensued. The typeface had to be approachable, confident and not explicitly masculine or feminine

assure **assure** **assure** assure

assure **assure** *assure* assure

assure **assure** **assure** assure

Figure 3-2 Logotype Exploration

assure

PRIEMIEM CONDOMS

assure

PRIEMIEM CONDOMS

Figure 3-3 Final Logotype

In reference to Figure 3-2 Logotype Exploration: the initially intriguing font ended up remaining the final solution. The stroke weight isn't as heavy or demanding as some of the others, the extended width mimics the elongation that occurs when a man is aroused, and the sans-serif is approachable but holds its own. roundedness of some of the other options. Serifs evoke a sense of elegance and femininity, rounded forms with no stabilizing edges were childish, narrower forms feel compressed, polite. The colored bar seen in Figure 3-3 Final Logotype was added beneath to give the logotype more weight, a stronger presence. The ability to pair to colors allows for quicker differentiation between products and also creates an electricity/energy. There we have it! Akzidenz-Grotesk BQ Light Extended is **assure's** brand font, and Anivers SC Regular SC Regular is the secondary or supporting typeface. With a little more flair Anivers is a perfect complement to the almost corporate appearance of Akzidenz-Grotesk.

## Supportive Elements

Other consistent visuals across **assure's** brand are: patterns, textures, icons and voice. Patterns and textures will be incorporated on the interior of the packaging and on the website. Icons will be used on the website to identify the different types of condoms available. The brand's voice will remain casual and at times funny and relatable on all content. The fifteen colors chosen earlier will be used for all supportive elements.





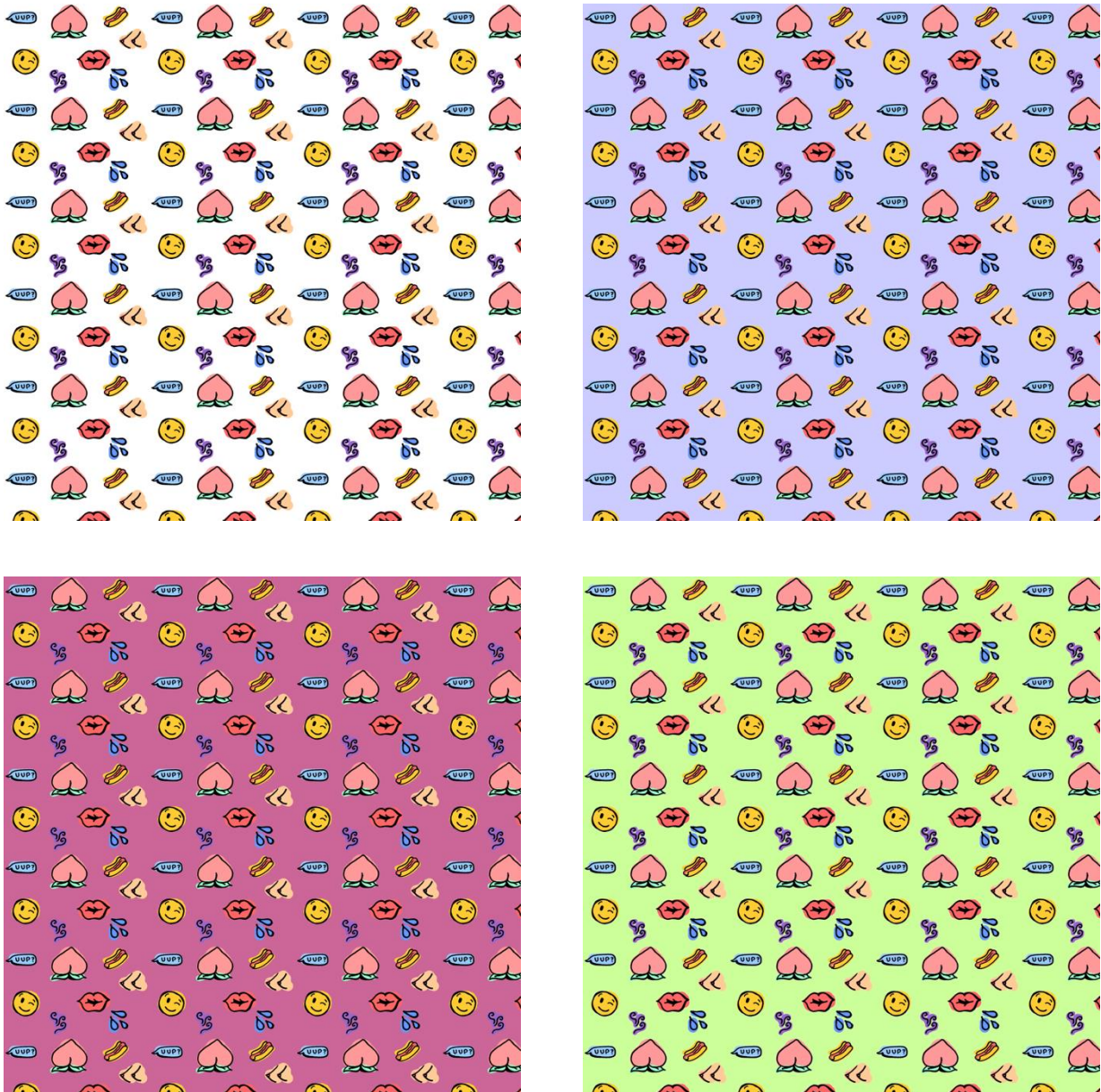


Figure 3-5 Pattern Color Variations



Figure 3-6 Condom Icons

## **Chapter 4**

### **Application**

#### **Packaging Design**

Beyond simple, the packaging only includes the necessary elements: a brand presence and regulatory text. The main focus became the website's presence and user interaction. This is the point of purchase. Color simply differentiates the styles of condom available. It is important to maintain a gender neutral, clean image as seen in Figure 4-1 assure: Condom Packaging. The consumer would receive a package in the mail with the brand pattern on the exterior, and the product simply on the inside. Anonymous from the exterior, but still identifiable, as seen in Figure 4-2 Mailing Package.



Figure 4-1 assure: Condom Packaging



**Figure 4-2 Mailing Package**

## Web Design

Beginning with the landing page (Figure 4-3 Landing Page), the user is immediately introduced to **assure**'s brand: approachable, fun and ungendered. The menu bar reads: "condom shop," "how we work," "resources," and "our story." Under condom shop the products available are presented. The second explains the subscription package available and the process that takes place after a user places an order. Resources is an important page with the content to support **assure**'s responsible persona. The page lists websites and other media that can be used to educate people about sex, protection, and consent. "Our story" is the typical "about" page just more personal.

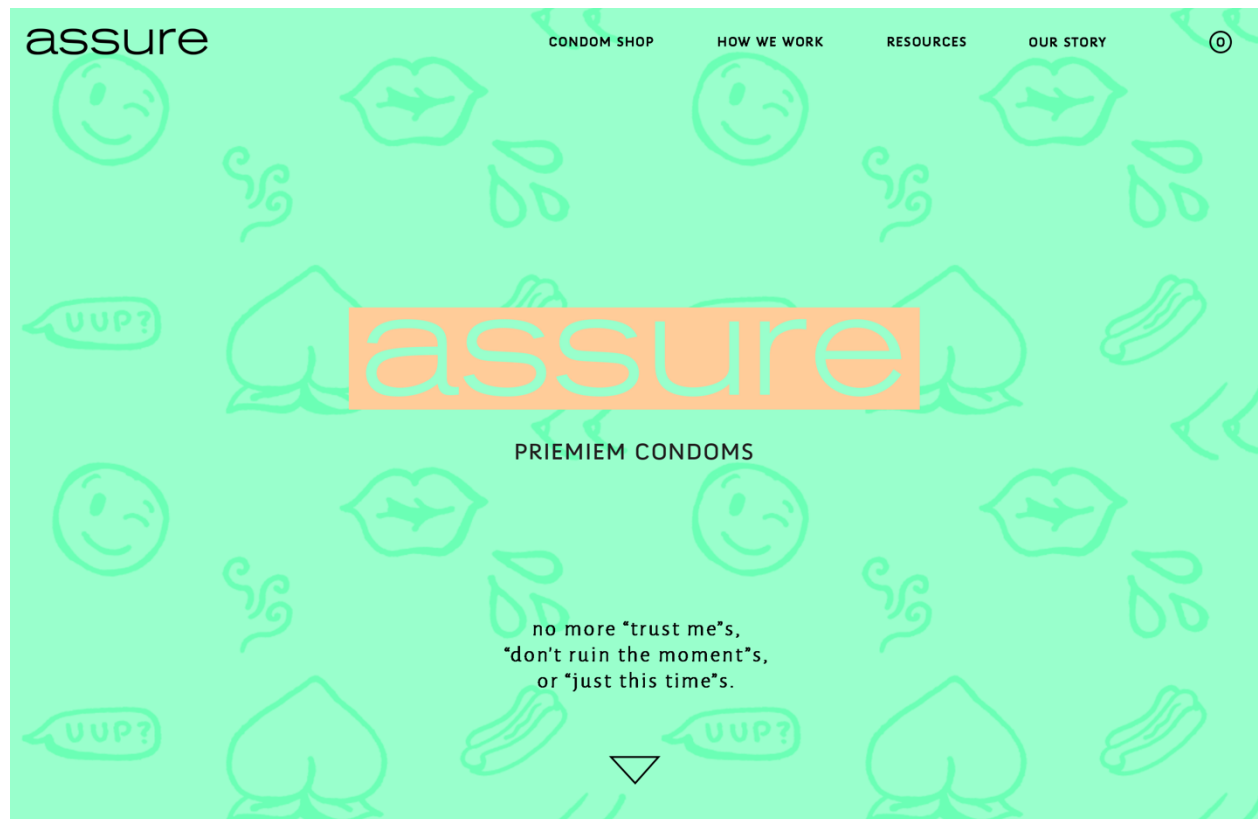


Figure 4-3 Landing Page



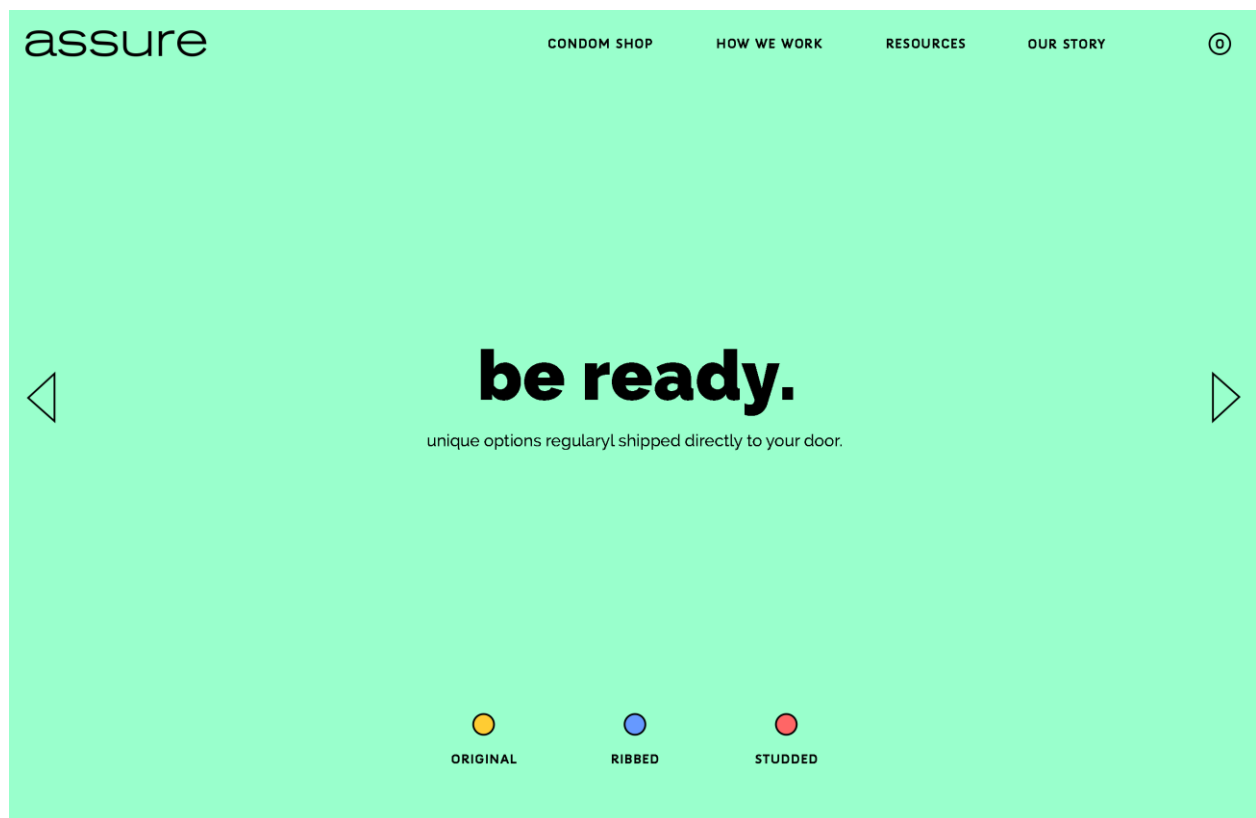
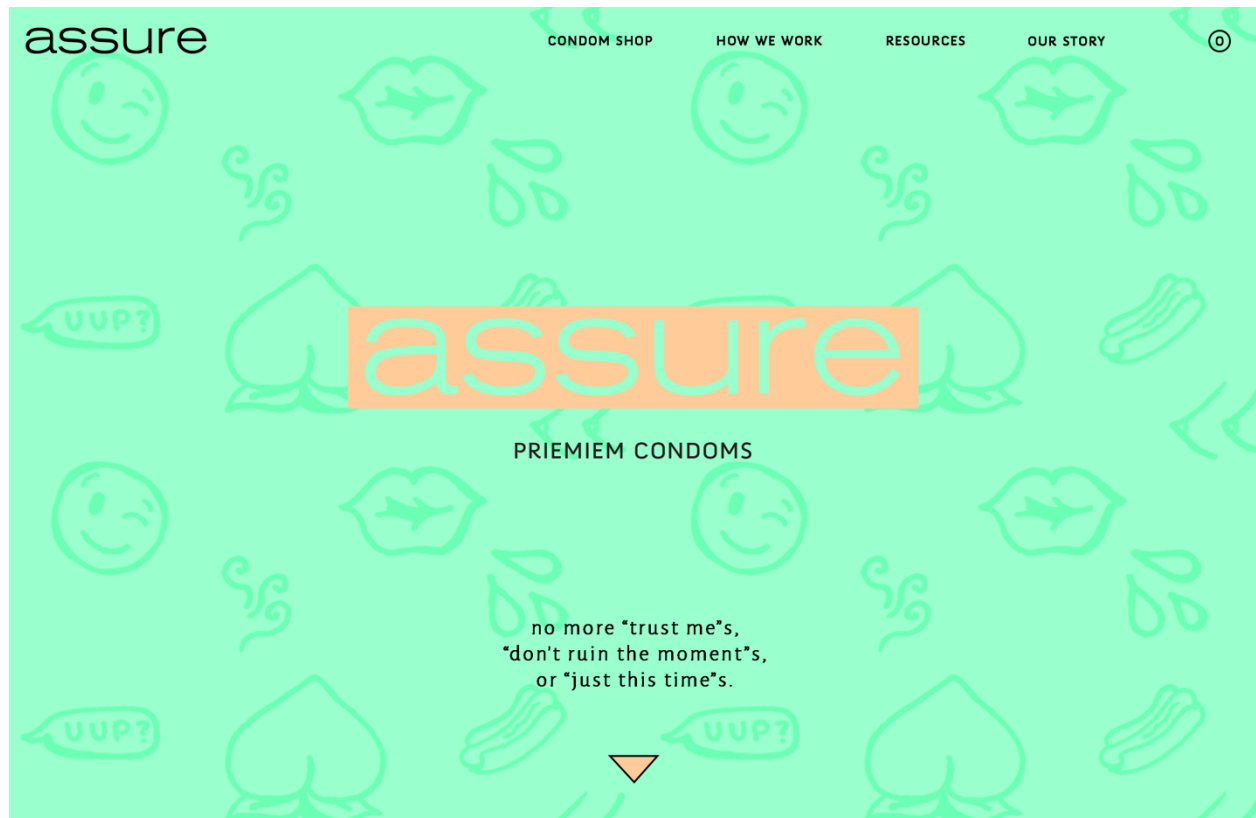


Figure 4-4 Landing Page: Clicked, Resulting Page

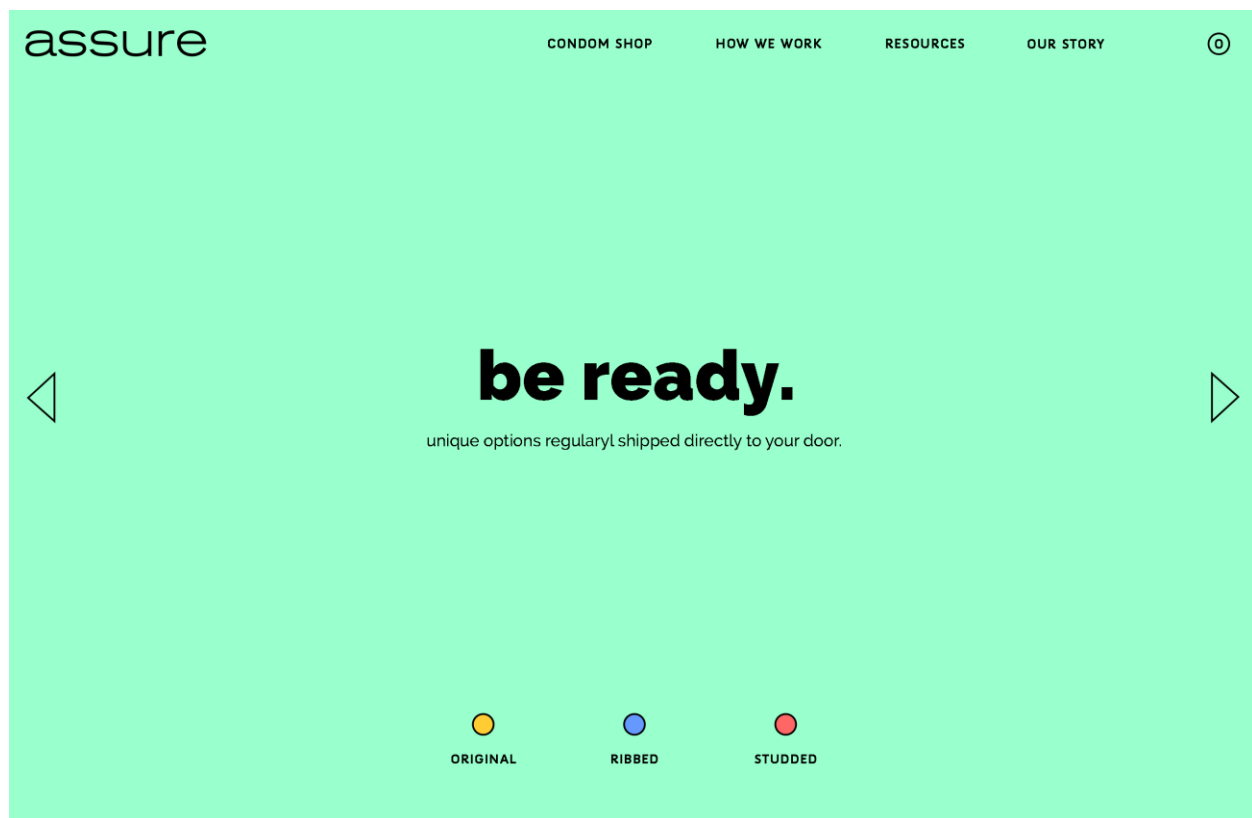


Figure 4-5 Condom Shop

A simple, but different horizontal scroll highlights the three products available and simply presents the customizable options through icons. When on one of the three pages the representational color bubble at the bottom's label swaps to "add to cart." Similar to the landing page, where the user has learned to click the arrow to scroll down, here the user clicks left or right to navigate between "original," "ribbed," and "studded."



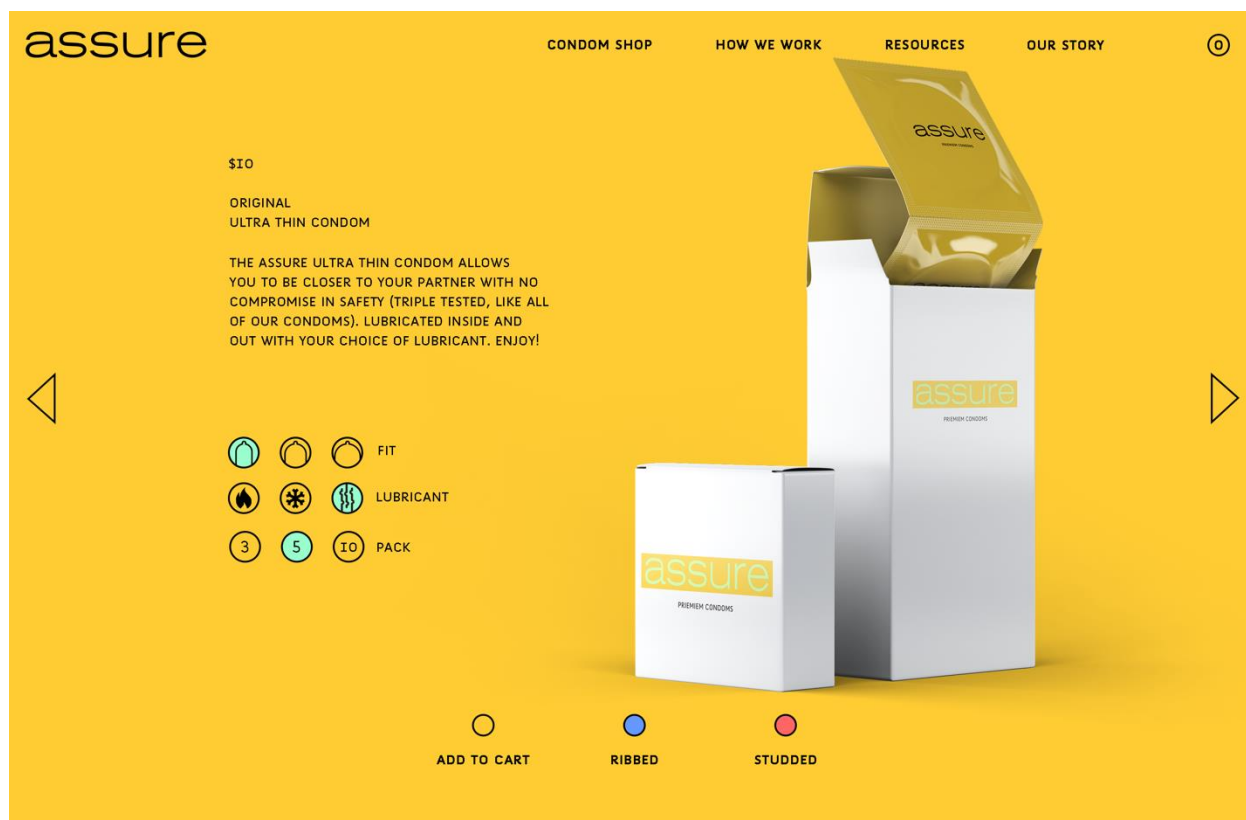
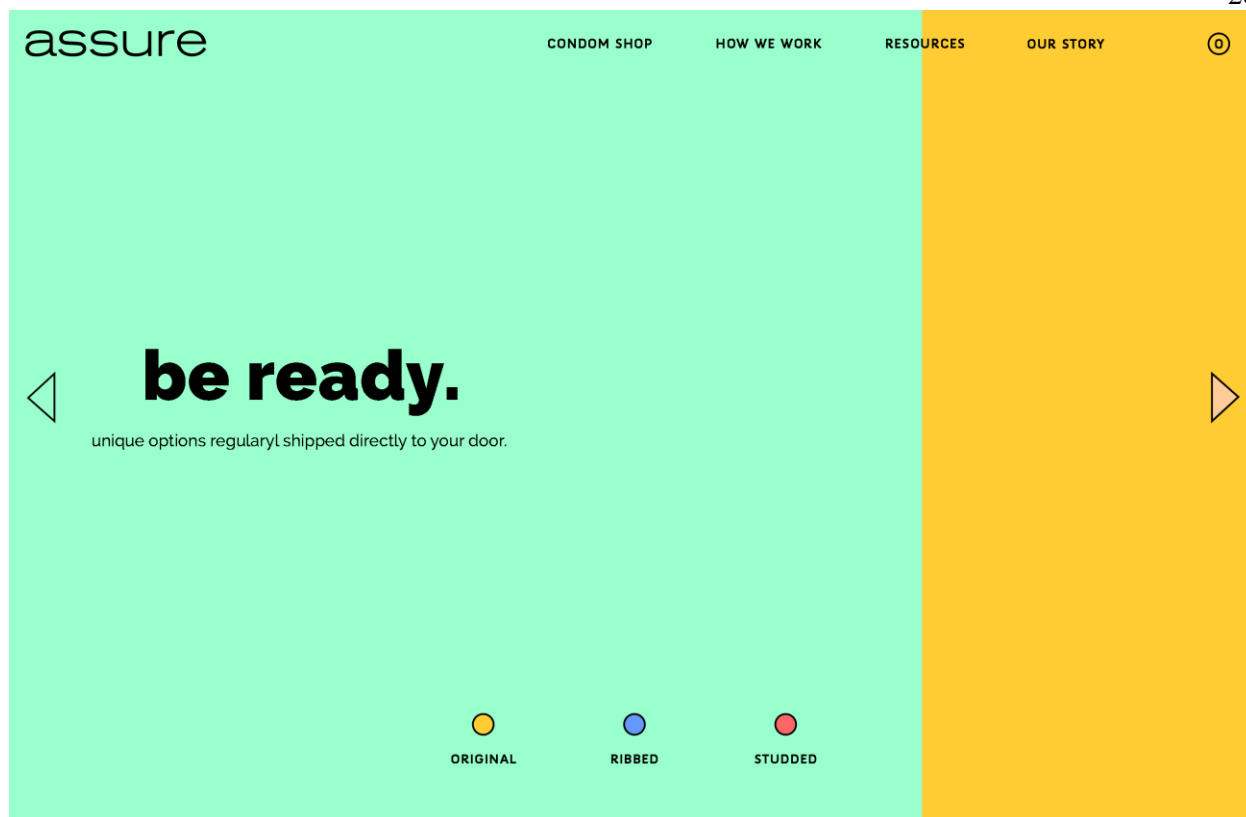


Figure 4-6 Condom Shop: Original

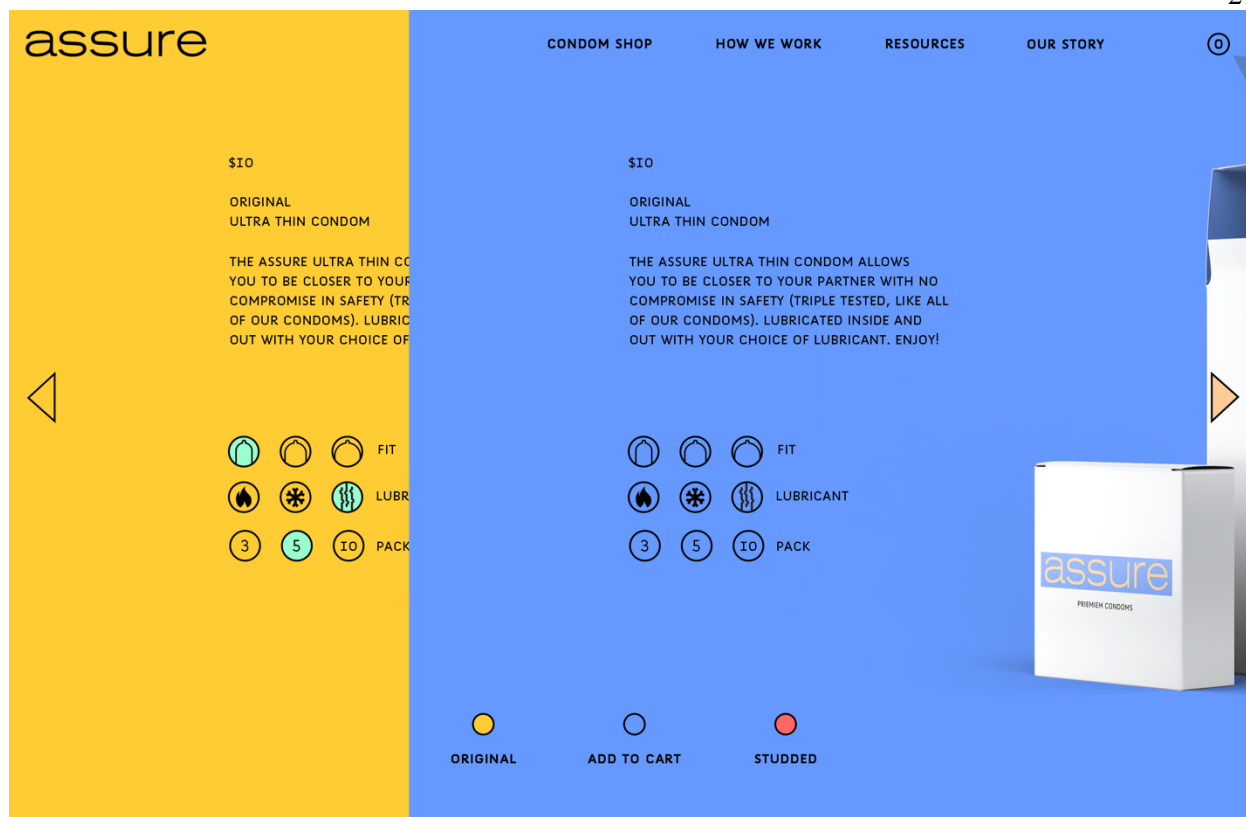


Figure 4-7 Condom Shop: Ribbed

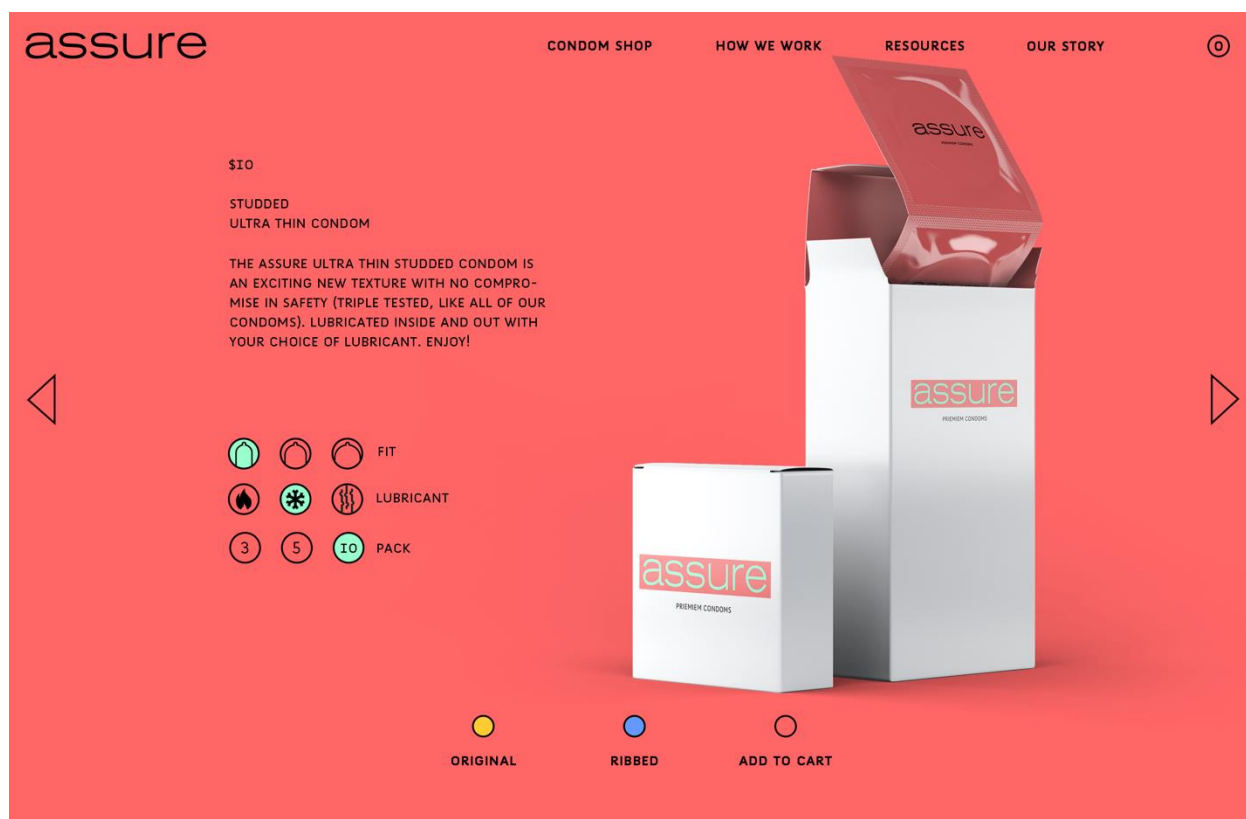
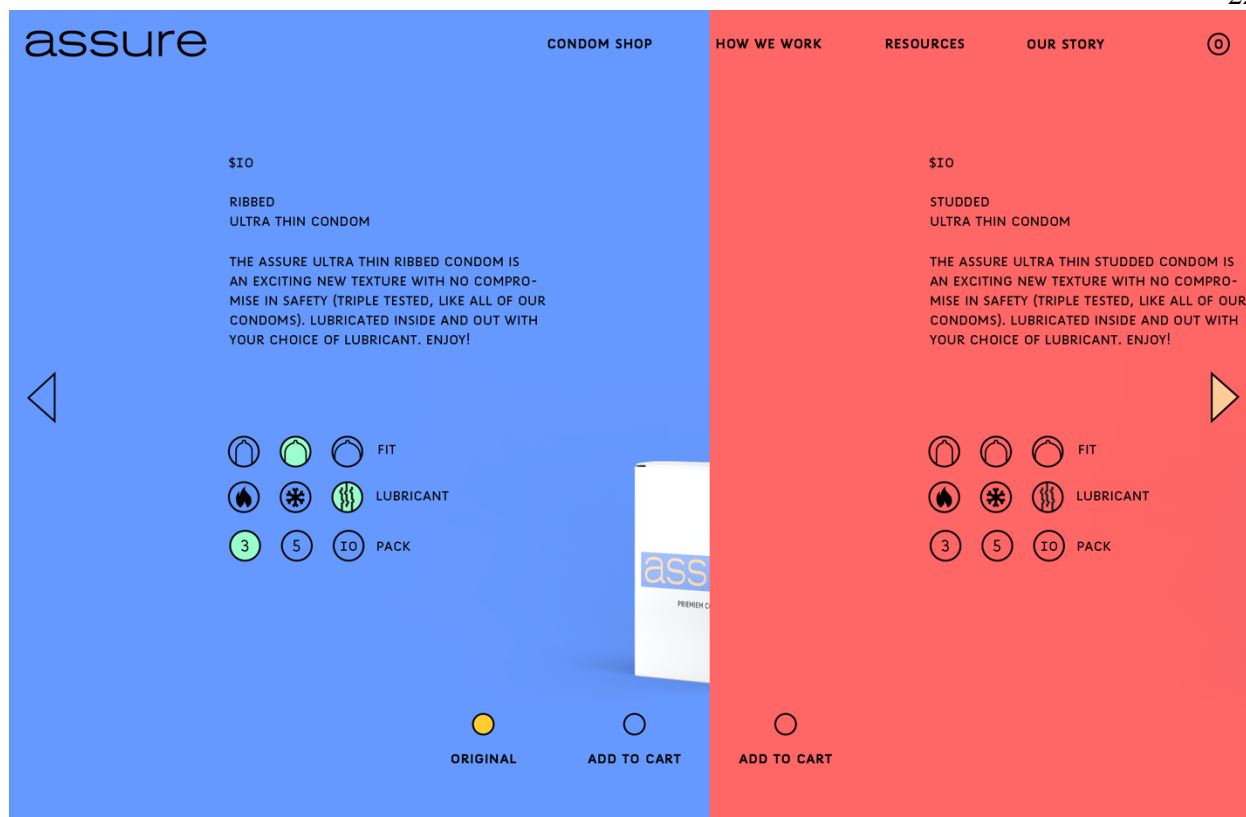


Figure 4-8 Condom Shop: Studded

## Chapter 5 Summary

### Process

This initiative flourished from observing and critically analyzing upon many unsuccessful and successful condom brands, as well as other sex products. From logo to exploring fun imagery through pattern, to web design, to package design, see select steps in the journey below on paper.

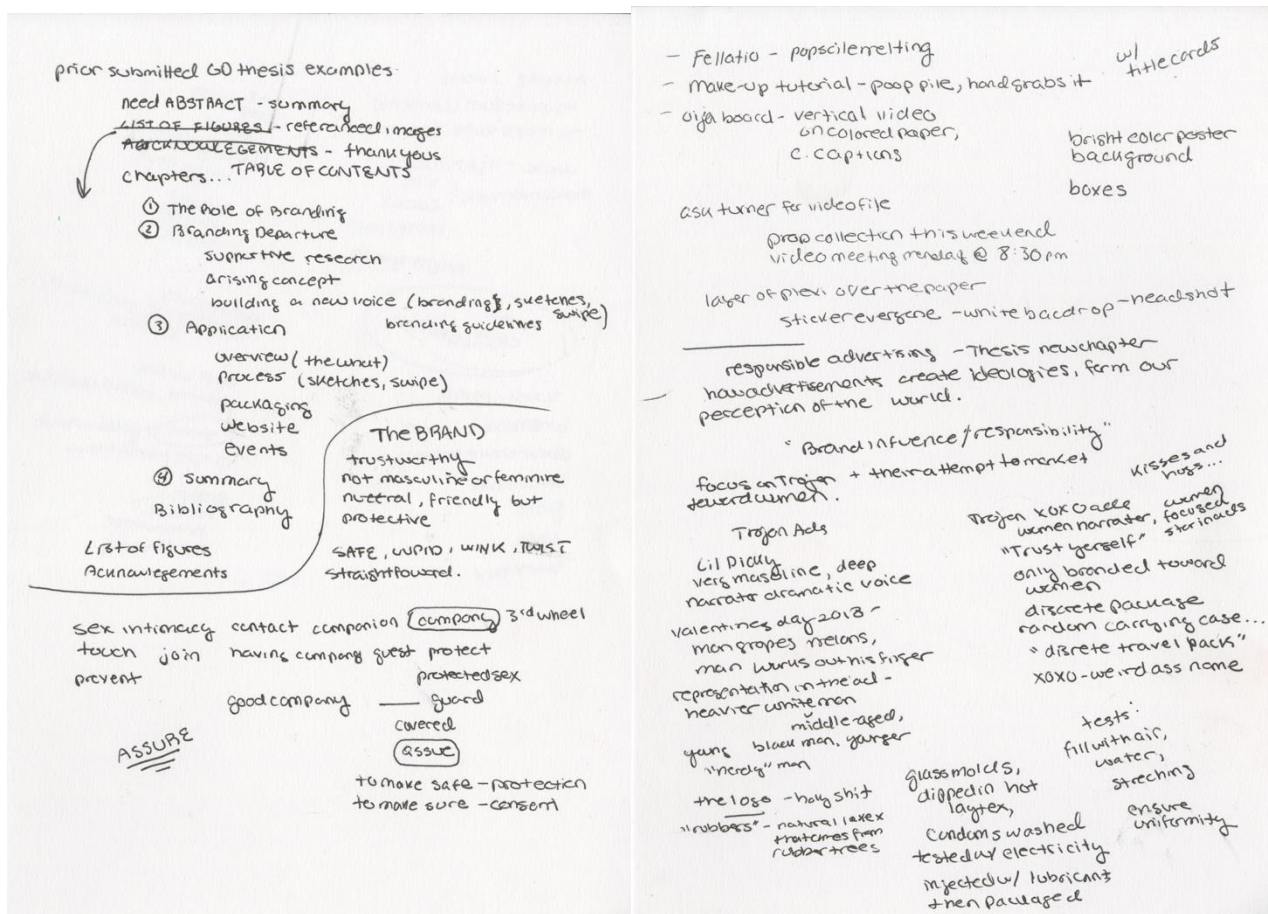


Figure 5-1 Planning & Research

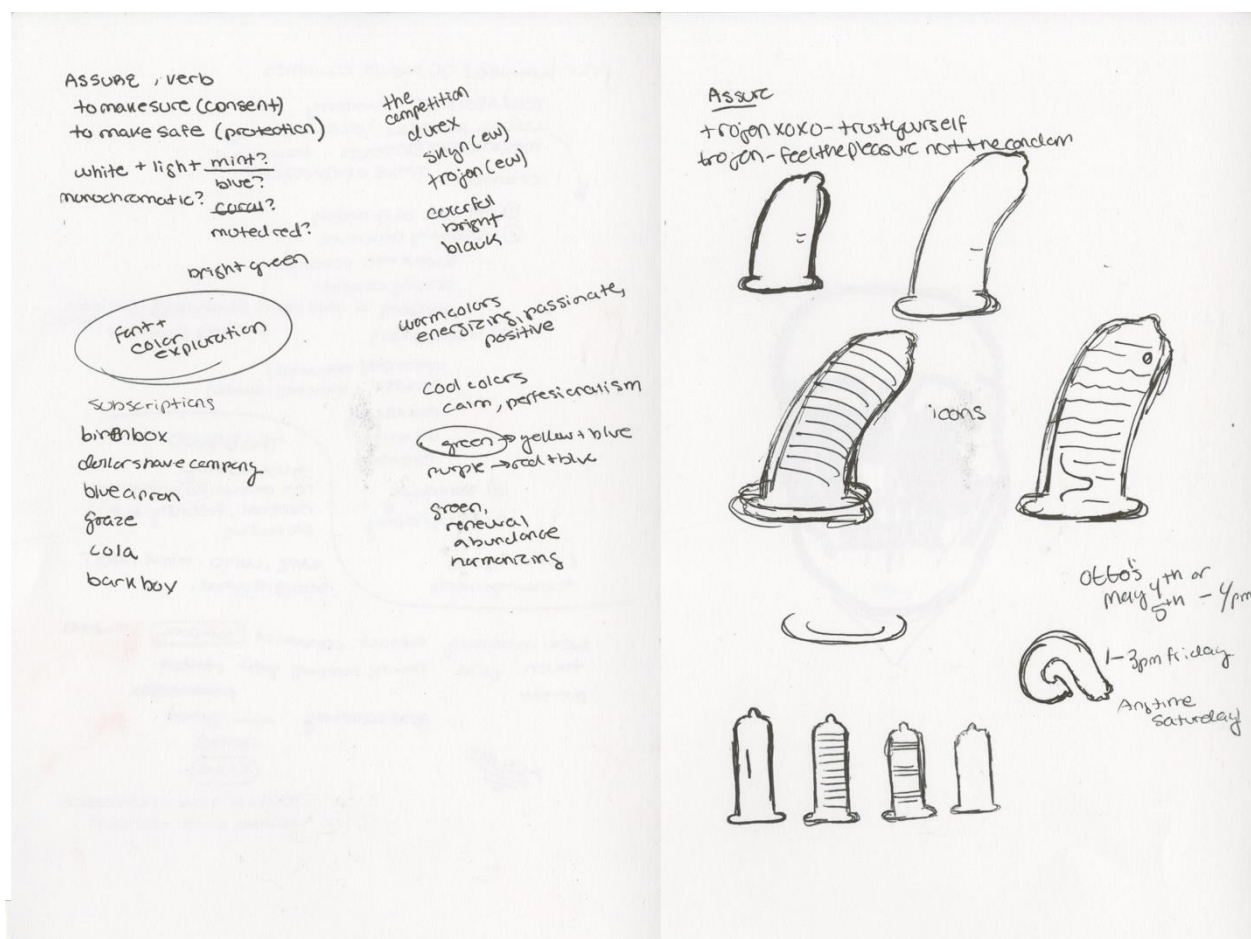


Figure 5-2 Color &amp; Icons

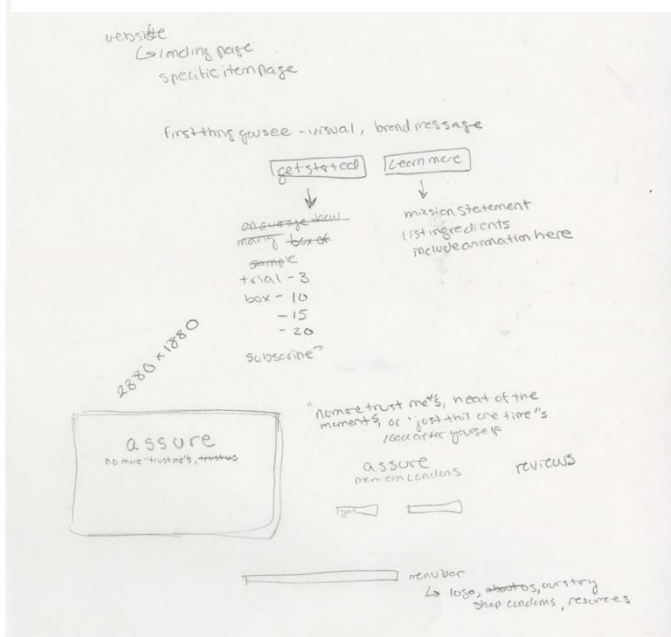


Figure 5-3 Web Elements

## Conclusion

A condom company for everyone, private and personal, delivered to your door. The good and the bad are already on the market but **assure** aims to fill the gaps in these brand's target audiences by remaining neutral to everyone.

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