



In Brazil, using Carnaval to fight HIV

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David Olson speaks on how Brazilians combine fun and responsibility during this year's Carnaval.

Sao Paulo, Brazil — Brazilians are bracing for the six days of Carnaval. The annual bacchanalian festival held 40 days before Easter, begins this weekend across this country of almost 200 million people. Many will participate directly as musicians, dancers and support staff. Millions will watch the parades, in person or by television. Companies sponsoring Carnaval see it as an opportunity for promoting their brand and selling their products, and many will use Carnaval as a license to engage in worldly pleasures of all kinds before the deprivations of Lent.

But one company, DKT Brazil, is taking a different approach and using Carnaval to promote responsible behavior — using condoms, specifically its *Prudence* brand, to prevent HIV infection. Typical Carnaval sponsors are companies like Mercedes Benz, Cacau Show (chocolate), Bombril (cleaning products) and beer companies. This is apparently the first time a company has sponsored Carnaval for a social purpose.



An example of the Carnaval advertisements. Photo credit: DKT Brazil

The mission of [DKT Brazil](#), an affiliate of [DKT International](#) working in Brazil since 1991, is to keep Brazilians healthy, not turning a profit. Their mission, translated from Portuguese, is:

"Improving lives; encouraging family planning; preventing sexually-transmitted diseases; pleasure and well-being; offering products that are accessible, diverse, innovative and high quality in Brazil and South America. Contributing to the social marketing projects of DKT International in the world."

DKT seeks out methods most appropriate for reaching their largely young audience: On World AIDS Day, it used street smarts and tech-savviness to reach young people [on](#) and offline. For more than 10 years, they have used [sexy condom advertising](#) to encourage condom use.

In March 2012, DKT entered the world of Carnaval, [signing an agreement](#) with the Tom Maior Samba School, one of São Paulo's 14 principal samba schools. DKT gives financial support to the school to participate in the 2013 São Paulo Carnaval and the school allows DKT to promote condoms and its *Prudence* brand in all its activities. DKT's investment in Carnaval represents 10 percent of its annual marketing budget.



Photo caption: Marketing condom use.

"It's more than a Carnaval parade, it's more than a promotional stunt, it's an act of social responsibility," said Dan Marun, DKT Brazil country director. "We spent an entire year working with the Carnaval community of São Paulo not only to produce a memorable parade, but also educating them on the importance of safe sex. We worked with sculptors, painters, embroiderers, carpenters, glaziers, seamstresses, costume designers, architects, choreographers and other artists to realize this dream."

The dream has manifested itself as "Park of Wishes: Your Passport to Pleasure", a story of pleasure and sexual history as it relates to the

condom. DKT worked with Carnaval master Marcus Aurélio Ruffin to create an irreverent story of condoms, sexual pleasure and the role of *Prudence* in preventing sexually-transmitted infections; pioneering products that provide fun and pleasure during sex.

Tom Maior's contingent in Carnaval will be composed of more than 3,000 dancers, musicians and logisticians and feature five huge floats. The school's band will perform a specially commissioned samba song.

In December, I visited the two centers of Tom Maior's universe — its workshop, where the floats and thousands of costumes are assembled, and the studio, where rehearsals have been held.

The workshop, where dreams come true

Fifty specialists from the Amazon (Amazonas are especially skilled at this work, I was told) have been working here since August to create five sumptuous floats out of metal, plaster, paper, cloth and a lot of creativity. Each float has a distinct theme:

Original Sin: The seduction of Eve in the Garden of Eden

Jurassic World: The origins of the human species in Central Africa

Carrus Navalis: The boat of a pagan Roman god featuring palaces of lust and pleasure

1,001 Nights of Pleasure: Arabian Nights and the world of genies and flying carpets

Freud Explains: Exploring the human mind through Sigmund Freud

Three hundred seamstresses work here, sewing the more than 3,000 elaborate costumes needed to clothe all of the dancers.



An example of the intricate costumes worn by dancers.

The studio, where Carnival comes alive

The school has rehearsed here most Saturdays since Easter 2012. On Dec. 1, World AIDS Day, it held a special performance that I was [lucky enough to witness](#)— five hours of samba music, pounding percussion and virtually nonstop dancing that looked like [this video](#).

The atmosphere was sensual and steamy-literally and figuratively. The age of the performers ranged from high energy teens to dignified and graceful women in their 60s, with hoop skirts inspired by Salvador de Bahia, the city where samba music originated. The special guests were a large delegation from Mocidade Alegre, the champion of the 2012 São Paulo Carnival.



The Tom Maior Samba School is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, having been founded in 1973 by "dissident sambistas" and college students frustrated with the political reality of the early 1970s. The school has

competed in every Carnival since 1974, winning the championship in 1992, 1995 and 1999 and second place in 1976 and 2004.

Photo Caption: Everybody samba!

All this work and effort will culminate in 65 minutes on Feb. 9, when the members of the Tom Maior Samba School will dance through the Sambadrome of Anhembi with 38,000 watching in person and 3 million worldwide (the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro carnivals are televised nationally and internationally).

The fruits of Tom Maior's long labor will be immediately obvious for all to see. The fruits of DKT's labor and hope for this Carnival — fewer HIV infections— will be less obvious in the short term but, as everyone hopes, much more significant over the long term.

Get in touch with David and send him a tweet at [@davidjolson](#).

