
Persil

Product innovation - the real McCoy.

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Lever Bros.

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BACKGROUND

For several years prior to the launch of Persil Tablets in June 1998, the detergent category had been relatively stable. Brands tended to lose or gain at most a couple of share points on an annual basis. And this despite a constant stream of product innovations from a variety of sources. Within this overall context, Persil had shown a gradual decline in market share and had suffered temporary damage by the Persil Power launch. Consumers were also fairly cynical about detergent advertising. It was frequently identified as among the least-liked category of advertising, even by its most usual primary audience i.e. housewives with children. Part of this hostility was due to a perception that detergent advertising was patronising and that it had little or no credibility, having debased the value of terms like 'new' and 'improved' through overuse.

MARKETING STRATEGY

The marketing strategy had 4 basic objectives:

- (1) To effectively launch Persil Tablets in the island of Ireland.
- (2) To communicate that tablets represented a genuine product innovation in a category where consumers were sceptical about such innovations.
- (3) To position Persil Tablets as representing a genuine convenient alternative.
- (4) To ensure that consumers knew how to use tablets correctly, particularly how to use the net which was crucial to effective usage.

Given the context of the launch, it was obvious that a different approach would be required. Consequently the marketing strategy consisted of three distinct elements.

- (1) An innovative above-the-line communications strategy.
- (2) Heavy and sustained media support - not just a launch but a sustained investment.
- (3) Very significant below-the-line investment.

ADVERTISING STRATEGY

It was obvious from the start that the advertising would play a crucial role in the success or otherwise of the launch. There was a real risk that the genuinely innovative nature of Persil tablets would be overlooked if the launch was communicated in the standard detergent advertising approach. The challenge became to break the mould of that advertising.

The solution came after significant market research with the realisation that the best way to deal with consumer scepticism was to meet it head-on. Thus, the 'Honesty' campaign was born. Using a quasi-documentary approach, 'ordinary' consumers were interviewed by an unseen interviewer. This device allowed for the product, its benefits and how to use it, to be put across in a convincing manner. The crucial element was not to allow those interviewed to appear over-enthusiastic about the product - they were impressed albeit in a low-key way, but were permitted to be sceptical and to even tease their interviewer. The campaign thus demonstrated a profound empathy

with its target audience who were consequently very receptive to its message. There was an acceptance that Persil Tablets was a convenient alternative, although an equal recognition that it would not change their love life.

CREATIVE MATERIAL

Given that the marketing strategy had as a prerequisite a heavyweight and sustained media campaign, and that this would necessarily entail refreshing that campaign at regular intervals, a large number of advertisements, across all media were produced. In fact, the initial launch period was supported as follows:

TV

2 x 60 sec TV commercials, plus 4 x 20 sec TV commercials. Subsequently a further 6 x 20 sec commercials were developed.

PRESS

2 x A4, 4 x 1/2 A4 press advertisements plus page ads in trade magazines.

RADIO

11 x 20 Sec Radio Commercials

POSTERS

2 x Superlite executions

CINEMA

1 x 60 sec commercial

The campaign was adapted to cater for subsequent innovations i.e. Persil Colour Tablets and Persil Double Layered Tablets, both of which were integrated with appropriate modifications.

RESULTS

The launch of Persil Tablets was and is a continuing spectacular success. In a market sector which for a long time had been characterised by relatively small-scale shifts, Persil Tablets represented a seismic shift. It quickly came to represent a significant part of the market and pushed the brand's overall market share to new heights. This success has been

maintained despite the arrival of the inevitable competitive brands. In addition, the multi-media strategy adopted in Ireland proved to be particularly successful - the Irish launch was the most successful in Europe.

BRAND SHARES (Island of Ireland)

	Aug '97	Aug'98	Aug'99	YTD'00
Total Persil	19.8%	21.7%	25.9%	28.8%
Persil Tablets	0%	5.3%	15%	19.3%

In just over two years, Persil Tablets has come to represent almost one fifth of the total detergent sector.

The advertising undoubtedly played a significant role in that success. In qualitative research, the 'Honesty' campaign was being spontaneously identified as respondent's favourite advertising (a first for detergents) and as the first advertising in the category that treated its target audience as intelligent adults. In addition, at one stage in 1999, the 'Honesty' campaign reached the number 2 slot in Irish Marketing Journal's Adwatch league - the highest ever placing for a detergent brand.

MEDIA STRATEGY

The media strategy was informed by the overall strategic requirement to communicate that Persil Tablets was not just another innovation from a detergent brand, that it represented a qualitatively different proposition. This translated into intense activity across all media selections.

TV

2525 HWC, all Ireland TVRs within six months of launch

OUTDOOR

Campaign began in week 2 of launch - 1060 Shopperlites and Citylites



RADIO

Also began in week 2 of launch. Multiple executions facilitated a constant on-air presence for six months.

PRESS

Multi-sized formats employed to ensure a constant 6 month presence in both press and magazine titles.

CINEMA

Cinema was also employed, using specially targeted films.

CONCLUSION

The launch of Persil Tablets has been an enduring success, particularly in the light of the prevailing conditions at the time of the launch. The legacy of Persil Power which had to be withdrawn was diminishing but was still affecting attitudes to the brand. Consumers were sceptical about any innovations from detergent brands and were particularly critical of advertising in the category.

The impact of Persil Tablets was immediate - in less than six months it came to represent 5% of the total detergent sector. That growth has continued, has survived the inevitable impact of competitive brands and has pushed the overall brand share to new heights.

The advertising undoubtedly had a key role. It represented a creatively innovative approach which ensured

that the genuine product innovation that Persil Tablets represented, would not be lost in a conventional advertising approach, would not be dismissed by consumers because it was communicated to them in a clichéd and debased way.

SUMMARY

Persil Tablets were being launched in a difficult environment for the brand and the category. Consumers were sceptical and even dismissive about product innovations and part of this was undoubtedly due to the traditional weakness of most advertising in this sector.

The marketing challenge was to ensure that the opportunity afforded by a genuine product innovation would not be lost. This required an innovative above-the-line communications strategy and sustained media support and significant below-the-line investment.

The 'Honesty' TV, press, radio and cinema campaign effectively broke the mould of detergent advertising - and was recognised as such by consumers. It brought a freshness to this category which ensured that consumers got the message.

The Persil brand now enjoys a significant leadership over the competition, being more than twice the size of its nearest competitor. The values of the brand have also been transformed and are now seen as more contemporary and relevant.



LEVER

1st

Persil Tablets.
A great wash - a great deal easier.

Persil
Performance 1st

KEEPS CLOTHES LOOKING YOUNG

Persil
Performance 1st

KEEPS CLOTHES LOOKING YOUNG

They clean brilliantly. They leave clothes soft. They're dermatologically tested. What more could you want?

A: Some help with the ironing

Q: What's so good about Persil Tablets?

A: You use exactly the right amount.

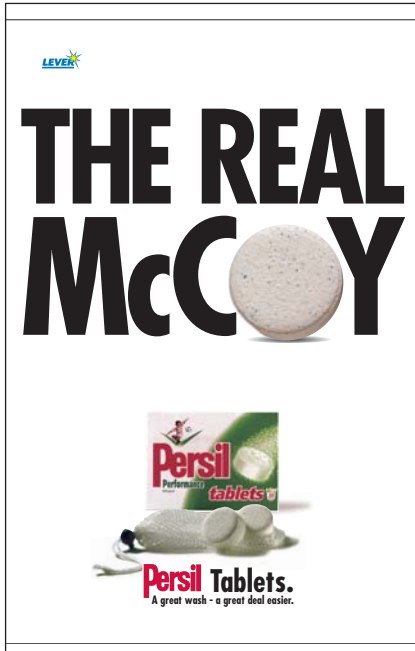
Q: Is that important?

A: It is - if your washing machine's on as often as mine.

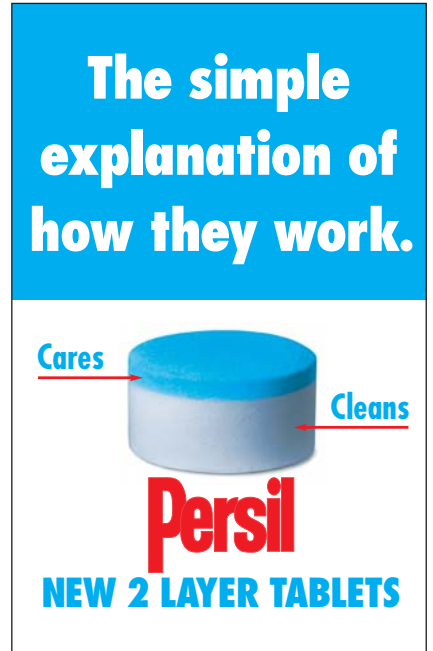
New Non-Bio Persil Tablets.

Press and magazine





Outdoor



Television



sky