

# Sprite

*How share of attitude translates into share of voice.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Irish soft drinks market is one of the most highly active and competitive categories, driven by powerful brands such as Coke, Diet Coke, Club Orange, 7Up and more recently mineral water and sports and energy drinks. The lemon and lime sector in this market has traditionally been dominated by 7Up, which, at the time of Sprite's launch, enjoyed a 91% share of the sector. This case study outlines how in its launch year of 2001, Sprite took 15 share points in this sector and continues to grow at 10% per year to date, while 7Up remains static and the growth of the overall carbonated soft drinks market is at 5% per annum.

## **MARKETING BACKGROUND**

Sprite had been previously launched in ROI in 1992 but due to a combination of factors (contractual franchise agreements, distribution issues etc.), it failed to penetrate the market and was eventually withdrawn. Latent brand awareness existed as it remained available in Northern Ireland. However in the Republic of Ireland, Sprite had very little brand saliency especially among the typical soft drinks target – the ever cynical and marketing-savvy teen audience. However in 2000, Coca-Cola Ireland re-evaluated its portfolio and decided to leverage the global position and status of Sprite and attack the monopoly that 7Up held within the lemon and lime sector.

## **MARKETING STRATEGY**

In order to penetrate the teen market we knew that Sprite had to establish a position that differentiated

it from the 'rest of the pack,' and especially from 7Up whose sales were largely driven by the housekeeper market and, in terms of brand equity, was not perceived to be part of the 'cool teen world'. When we explored what brands are part of the 'cool teen world' we identified a common denominator which admired teen brands have in common – attitude. Brands which reflect a certain 'youth cred' attitude are accepted because they really connect to a teen's world and the way they think. We wanted Sprite to have an attitude, which would make it become part of this world and thus an essential part of their drinking repertoire. The end objective would be to achieve and reinforce attitudinal change which would in turn lead to behavioural change thus generating brand loyalty, frequency of consumption and contributing to sustained volume growth over time.

## **ADVERTISING OBJECTIVES**

However, first we needed to understand the magic dynamics which establish an attitude and thus make a brand cool for teens. McCann Erickson's ongoing qualitative research programme, Pulse™, had given us a number of insights into the teenage market which gave us a rich contextual background from which to work. We knew that one of the most important issues for teens is their search for independence and the establishment of their own identity away from parents and gatekeepers.

Further research conducted with leading-edge teens confirmed our hypothesis that the attitude which teens really admire is one which is



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individual, honest, smart and confident. We also found that the international Sprite expression – "Image is nothing - obey your Thirst" – really resonated with teens, meaning trust your instinct and be true to yourself. These findings encapsulated the brand's ethos, which in turn inspired the creative platform for the brand – Sprite, tells it as it is.

We then conducted qualitative research in order to specifically probe teen's connection with and understanding of media. We wanted to identify points where the Sprite attitude could connect with our target's sense of independence and quest for self-identity. The key insights that emerged from these groups were that there are times and places where teens regard certain media as 'imposed' upon them but there are also certain alternative media which they perceive as being relevant and intimate to their lives. Furthermore where the medium and the message are truly integrated, we could maximise connection points to really engage with our target.

### **CREATIVE AND MEDIA EXECUTIONS**

The creative executions from the resultant campaign were driven by the following media connections. We wanted to bring the Sprite attitude to teens at times and in places where the brand could get right into their world and "tell it as it is".

- **Television:** TV was the primary medium used in order to gain the reach and frequency we needed for the launch. A tight media strategy ensured the focus was on buying programmes which fit with our creative messages and with which teens had a high affinity.
- **Outdoor:** A key insight from our research told us that hanging out on 'the street' was where teens spend a large proportion of their time and most importantly, feel most comfortable and true to themselves –

a place where they can express their real instincts and individualism. Furthermore, bus stops are a significant part of this street environment and somewhere where they tend to loiter and congregate with friends. Thus we used medium specific executions at bus stops, with campaigns running in alternate cycles heightening awareness and anecdotally creating a sense of anticipation as to what the next Sprite message would be. A further insight revealed that teens will always go to the top deck of buses. Thus Sprite became one of the first brands to advertise on the top of bus shelters becoming even more relevant and "cool" for teens as only those on the top deck could see them. Outside of Dublin, transport was again used cleverly in the form of bus carousel advertising. Finally admobiles were used to target schools at leaving and junior cert exam results.

- **Cinema:** Cinema was used throughout the year further enhancing the overall experience and 'coolness' of the brand. Medium specific copy was used in a new and innovative way and placement was at the start of the commercial reel playing on the cinema experience.
- **Ambient:** We identified certain urban clothing and music stores which teens associate with street cred and coolness – access to these stores was developed through a "flyer" distributor. With Sprite branded flyer racks, a new and intimate medium was developed. The medium was further developed to include wall posters called 'Sprite Gig Guides' associating Sprite with "underground" type brands. Mirror stickers were also developed for the changing rooms.

Through a carefully integrated creative and media strategy, using media at the right time, in the right place and with the right message, the

brand values and ambition of Sprite were fully realized.

**RESULTS**

By year-end 2001 Sprite was 63% ahead of expectations. Qualitative research conducted by IMS concluded that the growth of the brand was heavily driven by the advertising and the Sprite personality and attitude it had created. Respondents:

- Had a high level of spontaneous recall for Sprite advertising
- Perceived the advertising as innovative, challenging and dynamic
- Perceived it as directly speaking to teens on their level and therefore worthy of earning their respect

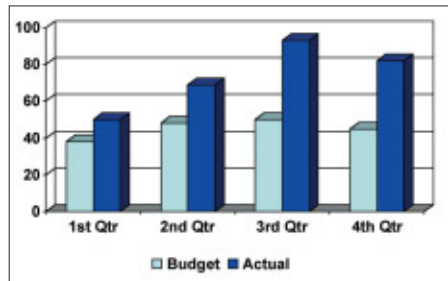
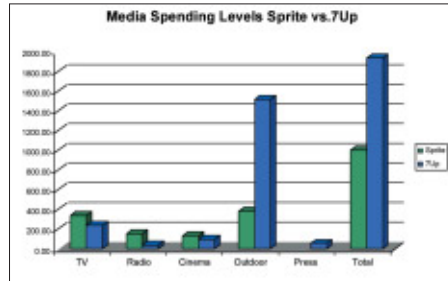
*"Consumer perceptions of the Sprite brand are heavily grounded in the advertising campaign. Personification of the brand bears strong resemblance to the boy in the escalator advert, and many of the outdoor adverts have given the brand a unique sense of humour. Sprite seems to lack any life or identity outside of the advertising. There are no other strong reinforcements of the brand image (sponsorship little known, no promotions, little Point of Sale activity)*

Source: IMS Qualitative Benchmark Study 2001

The effectiveness of Sprite's advertising is further proved when we compare competitive media spends to category share. Even though 7Ups spend outweighed that of Sprite, its

category share declined from 91% to 80% while concurrently Sprite grew from 2% to 17%. Furthermore Sprite was the clear driver of category growth as sales grew from 22m litres to over 27.3m litres.

As is apparent from the chart below, in terms of actual sales, Sprite

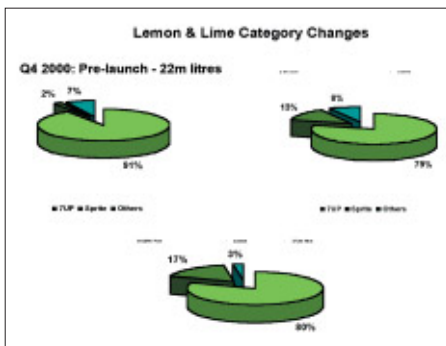


far exceeded its forecasted targets.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Advertising transformed Sprite from a brand that had little resonance with its target to one which has strong recognition and is perceived as very relevant to teen lives. It has gained significant inroads into its competitors market and has been the sole growth driver of the lemon and lime sector. In an over-crowded and aggressive marketplace Sprite ads established a distinctive, strong personality and attitude creating a real differentiator for the brand, which in tangible terms has translated into sales well ahead of its forecasted targets.

*"When we briefed McCann-Erickson, I could not have expected the impact that the advertising would have on our sales. The challenge of breaking into a very aggressive market*



*was a stiff one but the insights that drove the campaign succeeded in engaging with our (elusive) audience in a real and exciting way creating advertising which drove all of our sales activity during the launch"*

Aedamar Howlett. Brand Manager, Coca-Cola Ireland

### **SUMMARY**

In 2001 Sprite was launched by Coca-Cola Ireland in order to gain market share in the lemon and lime sector dominated by 7Up.

In order to cut-through a highly competitive and cynical teen market and engage with this elusive target, Sprite needed to differentiate itself from 'the pack' and cut-through via attitude. We wanted to bring a Sprite attitude to teens at times and in places

where the brand could get right into their world and 'tells it as it is'.

The creative executions from the campaign were driven by media connection points. All Sprite messages were medium specific bringing the immediacy and relevance of the brand to the teen world. The use of various 'underground' media was pioneered – e.g. gig guides, flyer racks, mirror stickers – in order to bring street cred and teen cool to the brand.

By year end 2001 total sales volume was 63% ahead of target. In its launch year, Sprite had taken 15 share points in this sector and continues to grow at 16% while 7Up remains static. Qualitative research revealed that advertising had created a distinctive and engaging brand personality for Sprite.



there'll be  
**another**  
one along  
in a minute.  
**yeah**  
**right!**

Image is nothing  
Thirst is everything  
Obey your thirst



£1 on the bus  
and you can't talk  
to the driver.  
£5 in a taxi and  
he won't shut up.  
It's funny 'cos it's true.

Image is nothing  
Thirst is everything  
Obey your thirst



**exact**  
**fare!**  
take me  
**exactly**  
home then!

Image is nothing  
Thirst is everything  
Obey your thirst

