



SURF

Soap Opera: refuting the product lifecycle theory.

■ BACKGROUND

For years Unilever and Procter & Gamble have been locked in battle for share of the detergent market.

During the 1980s, the number of product variants expanded rapidly as the major powder brands were also offered as liquids and concentrates. Both Procter & Gamble and Levers invested the major part of their advertising budget in promoting these line extensions. However, research in the early 1990s indicated that a significant number of consumers in Ireland were resisting the move to concentrated products, preferring to stay with conventional powders. Central to this inertia was the perception that new formats represented poor value for money. With household sizes substantially larger than the European norm, economy was an important factor for Irish housewives.

■ MARKETING BACKGROUND

In the late 1980s Levers achieved a significant breakthrough in market share with the launch of Radion. Procter & Gamble retaliated with the launch in 1990 of Daz Automatic - a conventional powder in the economy sector.

Lever Ireland did not have a strong brand in this sector: Surf had received no effective support since the late 1980s, and had lapsed from the consumer's consciousness.

Yet research showed that the Surf name had no major negative associations. To combat Daz, revitalization of Surf carried less financial risk than the creation of a completely new brand.

In September 1992 McCannells were asked to prepare advertising concepts for Surf Automatic.

■ MARKETING STRATEGY

The strategy underlying the relaunch

had two components :

- *Consistent competitive pricing.*
- *Strong consumer advertising.*

The detergent sector had been characterized by heavy below-the-line activity: but no provision was made in the Surf marketing plan for this kind of support.

Economy brands normally involve reduced profit margins. For the re-launch to succeed, Surf had to be a commercially viable proposition from the outset. Television is the primary medium of detergent advertising and forms a distinct category within the whole advertising market. Advertising overall tends to be intrusive and is frequently singled out for criticism by consumers. Yet awareness studies show that detergent advertising tends to achieve a high level of spontaneous recall. Much detergent advertising is formula driven - Daz has used the presenter format since the early days of television.

As a consequence, concepts proposed for Surf would be assessed on :

- *Impact:* would have to surpass category norms.
- *Linkage:* the campaign would require a strong Surf property.
- *Campaignability:* the advertising format chosen would have to be capable of delivering multiple executions.
- *Affordability:* the advertising format chosen would permit an acceptable production/media spend ratio.

■ ADVERTISING OBJECTIVES

Objectives of the campaign were to establish Surf as a strong brand in the economy sector and as a result:

- Take market share from Daz and
- Build Levers' market share position.

The brief was simple:

*Category 3
Bronze Award*

*McCannells
Advertising*

*Ian Whyte
Laurence Keogh
Shane Forsyth*

Communication: Surf offers an unbeatable combination of value and all-round performance.

Target: mid-market, value conscious housewives.

Tone: impactful, distinctive, modern.

Practical considerations: budget.

■ EXECUTION

Creative

We believed that a presenter format would be the most direct way of conveying our product message, but research showed that this was perceived as old fashioned.

Coupling a fading brand with a tired advertising format could compound rather than relieve Surf's problems. The key was to find a personality who could update the format and who could become the modern identity of Surf. We drew up a profile of our ideal presenter: Mary McEvoy from Glenroe was an almost perfect fit. The choice of Mary brought an extra advantage: we had evidence that consumers would respond positively to the inclusion of an Irish dimension in advertising - even in such a multinational product category.

It was essential that the script complemented Mary's directness. The money-back guarantee on the pack was developed into a central selling point, distilling Surf's proposition into "great value plus guaranteed performance".

Since Lever Ireland have responsibility for sales & marketing in Northern Ireland the proposed campaign had to have validity for the whole of Ireland. "Glenroe" is networked on UTV and research in Northern Ireland indicated that Mary's status as a television personality was sufficiently strong to overcome prejudice at a political level.

Once the presenter format was selected, it was decided to invest in the production of two test films for research. In one, a conventional, static, direct-to-camera style of delivery was used, the other featured a more fluid and relaxed format. The second format was clearly preferred.

The image to be conveyed was of a

person for whom value - when combined with quality - was important. So nothing in the set was to appear too up-market or inaccessible. For the first film we designed a kitchen set that might belong in an older suburban house which had been modernized in stages.

The first commercial went on air in February 1993 and there was an immediate sales response. The second commercial was first transmitted in August 1993 and as a result of continued growth in sales, provision was made for the production of new commercials in 1994.

Retaining the basic script elements, the **third** film emphasised Surf's effectiveness across the whole wash. The **fourth** film - set primarily in "Mary's back garden" - combined a particularly challenging message with the freedom of an outdoor setting.

Presenter 5, shot in April 1995 continued the evolution by exploring more of Mary's house. The **sixth** film, made in August '96, took Mary out of the house altogether.

The last two films have been supported by 10 sec cutdowns intended for tactical use - specifically to counter the launch of own-brand powders from the major multiples.

Mary's strong personality lent itself naturally to radio advertising. This medium has been used to complement the television campaign.

Media

Nearly 90% of housewives buy automatic washing powder, and weekly shoppers account for 75% of market volume. To exploit this high frequency of purchase, we planned Surf advertising on an effectively continuous basis. During 1994, Surf was advertised for 45 weeks. In 1995 and 1996, 48 weeks advertising was planned.

The availability of 10 second copy from August 1995 helped the achievement of targets. Standardisation of copy and media planning on an all-Ireland basis also increased campaign efficiency. Finally, radio has been used as a support medium to communicate brand news such as pack changes to Eco-bags and twin-pack offers.



TABLE 1 - SALES INDICES (EX FACTORY)

| | 93/92 | 94/93 | 95/94 | 96/95 | Cumulative |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------|
| ROI | +140 | +51 | +63 | +27 | +650 |
| NI | + 31 | +60 | +58 | + 3 | +241 |
| Total | + 58 | +57 | +60 | +11 | +341 |

TABLE 2 - MARKET SHARES (SOURCE TN-AGB/C&L)

| | '92 | '93 | '94 | '95 | '96 |
|-------|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| ROI | 1.3 | 2.8 | 4.2 | 7.0 | 8.2 |
| NI | n/a | 9.5 | 14.3 | 20.1 | 22.2 |
| Total | n/a | 5.3 | 7.6 | 11.4 | 12.9 |

SURF'S ADWATCH PERFORMANCE
(Source : Lansdowne)

| | 93 | '94 | '95 |
|---------------------------------|----|-----|-----|
| Cumulative appearance ranking | 10 | 5 | 5 |
| Performance/spend index ranking | 9 | 4 | 3 |

RTE TV EXPENDITURE ON DETERGENT BRAND (£000's)

| BRAND | '93 | '94 | '95 | '96 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| PERSIL | 669.4 | 718.0 | 770.3 | 485.6 |
| % | 22.4 | 26.6 | 32.4 | 23.2 |
| RADION | 577.3 | 257.4 | 41.7 | 161.3 |
| % | 18.5 | 9.6 | 1.8 | 7.7 |
| SURF | 371.0 | 287.4 | 237.6 | 263.2 |
| % | 11.9 | 10.7 | 10.0 | 12.6 |
| ARIEL | 778.8 | 619.0 | 554.3 | 448.3 |
| % | 24.9 | 23.0 | 23.3 | 21.4 |
| BOLD | 196.2 | 258.4 | 268.0 | 222.2 |
| % | 6.3 | 9.6 | 11.3 | 10.6 |
| DAZ | 363.9 | 401.1 | 364.3 | 366.3 |
| % | 11.6 | 14.9 | 15.3 | 17.5 |
| FAIRY | 137.7 | 153.3 | 142.2 | 146.5 |
| % | 4.4 | 5.7 | 6.0 | 7.0 |
| TOTAL | 3124.3 | 2694.6 | 2378.4 | 2093.4 |

Surf has achieved all of the objectives - both short and long term - set at the time of the relaunch. It is now established as a major brand in the economy sector and has strengthened Levers overall market share.



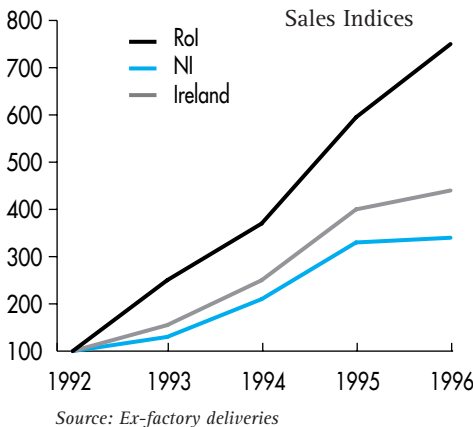
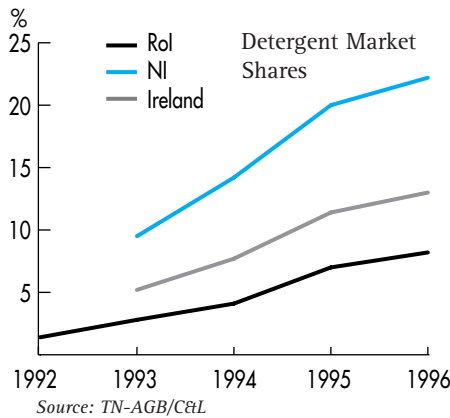
PRESENTER 3
(January '94)

"...if you're not happy with Surf, Lever Brothers will give you your money back. It says so on the pack. You can't ask for more than that"



PRESENTER 4
(August '94)

"Could you find a washing powder that gives you better value than Surf?"



RESULTS

The campaign has produced outstanding sales results, with Surf's ROI market share increasing from 1.3% to 8.2%. The campaign has proved sufficiently durable to produce continued growth in sales volume both in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. During 1996 Surf achieved brand leader position in the Northern Ireland market.

The commercial has generated a high level of public interest and general comment. At its first outing, Presenter 1 achieved a placing in the regular Adwatch top 10.

In 1994, with Presenter 3 & Presenter 4 Surf achieved a cumulative fifth position in the Adwatch ratings, on a low budget relative to the expenditure of the other leading contenders. In 1995 Surf held this place, with an even stronger performance in terms of value for advertising money spent.

Research has confirmed that the "money back guarantee" is a key element of the campaign communication. Despite achieving a very high level of awareness in recall research, this claim has produced less than 100 requested refunds during the three and a half years of the campaign. The line "...and if you're not happy, Lever Brothers will give you your money back" has become a national catch phrase.



PRESENTER 5
(August '95)

*"Have you tried no nonsense Surf yet?
You'd need a good reason not to"*



PRESENTER 6
(July '96)

*"I buy a washing powder with a guarantee.
Do you?"*

■ CONCLUSION

The Surf Presenter campaign is a striking example of the revival of a failing brand.

A local advertising initiative specifically tailored to the Irish market has proved to be a successful investment.

Surf has achieved all of the objectives - both short and long term - set at the time of the relaunch. It is now established as a major brand in the economy sector and has strengthened Levers' overall market share. This has been particularly important since 1995 when the trend to conventional powders accelerated. Surf was well placed to ensure that Levers have gained most from this growth.

The detergent sector is highly competitive and is supported with high levels of TV ratings: by use of detail, the interest and life of the Surf commercial can be enhanced.

Finally, as the ultimate test of success, the Irish Presenter campaign format has been adopted by Surf in the U.K.