

Smithwick's

'Halting the decline of a great Irish brand'.

INTRODUCTION

Smithwick's is an important and profitable brand in the Guinness Ireland Group portfolio. It is the number 3 brand in the R.O.I. Since the early 80's its sales have been declining, leading to the adoption in the last four years of a brand strategy aimed at retaining existing drinkers and halting the rate of decline.

The "Locals" TV campaign has been extraordinarily successful in achieving this goal. It is the contention of this case study that all other factors considered, "Locals" TV has had a profound effect not only on sales but also on the image and awareness of the great Irish ale brand.

MARKETING BACKGROUND

During the 1970's the beer market was dominated by three brands – Guinness, Smithwick's and Harp.

During the 1980's a seismic level of societal change occurred in Ireland. Younger people became more assertive and ambitious, more self confident about their Irishness, while simultaneously being more knowledgeable about and open to international influences. Young Ireland was becoming a more calculating and materialistic society.

Smithwick's was suddenly out of place and out of time. Although Irish, it could never approach the high ground that Guinness owned. It therefore fell between the growing desire for the rest of the world – Heineken, Carlsberg and Budweiser – and an Irish icon whose stature it could never aspire to.

Consequently Smithwick's brand share halved during the mid-80's.

In 1984 the first series of

commercials McConnells produced was based in an urban gritty city centre and featured a group of fairly hard men. Titled: "**Amazing**" "**Stand Tickets**" and "**Band**".

Research reported back within a year or two, that although some aspects of the campaign were liked – overall it wasn't sufficiently aspirational.

The next series of commercials titled "**Job**" "**Watch**" and "**Football**", more or less the same genre as the first series moved up market in terms of location and cast. These were followed by another series titled "**Home coming**", "**All heart**" and "**Missing Pint**".

The brand however continued to decline. In 1988 McConnells produced a commercial which essentially answered the 1984 brief in every respect – urban street cred in abundance but with a cast that was aspirational to all social groups. This commercial – "At the heart of the night" had very high quality production values and a superb music track. It was an immediate success with an increasingly advertising literate target audience. But it had no discernible effect on recruitment, and the gap between the sophistication of the commercial and the reality of the Smithwick's brand image was becoming a serious problem. A series of commercials titled "Get into it" served to underline this point further.

MARKETING STRATEGY

In 1995, an unapologetically single minded strategy was adopted: to consolidate the existing brand loyalists and slow the rate of decline.

Detailed market research led to an



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important insight into the target audience. Smithwick's drinkers are predominantly male. Smithwick's men saw themselves as unpretentious, down to earth people, who were in their own way quietly self confident. To them a pint of beer was a social lubricant not a deeply meaningful statement about themselves. They enjoyed a social night out and despised ostentation of any kind.

ADVERTISING OBJECTIVES

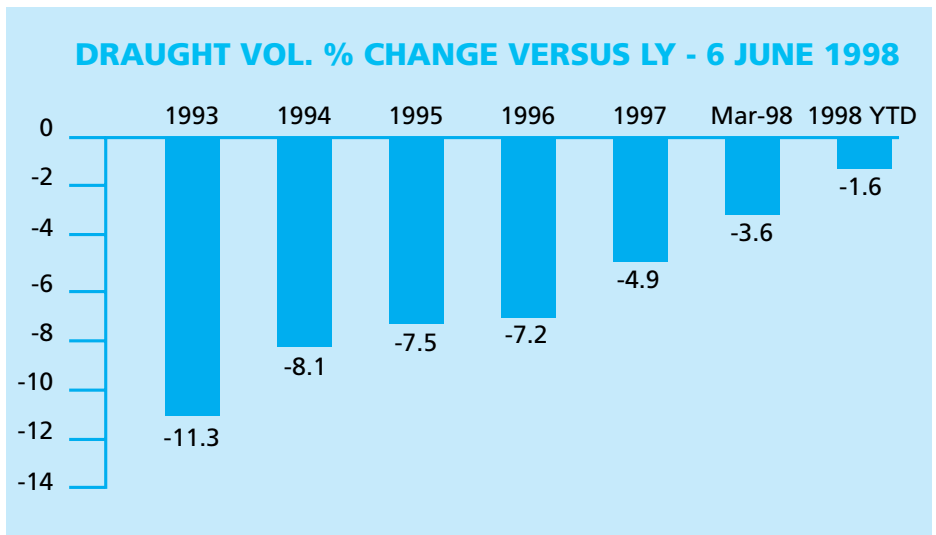
The advertising proposition had to faithfully reflect this quiet self-confidence. It would also have to

To date there have been 12 executions in the full TV campaign including a tactical commercial which helped to successfully launch a new Smithwick's brew with a longer lasting head.

RESULTS

CAMPAIGN PERFORMANCE

The "Locals" campaign had immediate positive effects on the Smithwick's brand. Millward Brown research indicated that ale drinkers, most of whom are Smithwick's drinkers, felt that:



present the brand as **"the beer that's essential to easy relaxed social drinking"**.

"Easy drinking" is to be always understood in terms of both the product experience and the sociability of the drinking occasion.

The campaign theme would also have to be "big" enough to facilitate other essential support media, most importantly local radio, outdoor and press.

In 1995 the first "Locals" TV campaign commenced with 4 executions: **"Quite a night", "Sunday", "Wedding" and "Half time"**.

- "Locals" was about Smithwick's drinkers and made them feel more like drinking Smithwick's.
- 74% of the drinkers rated "Locals" campaign better than most drink ads.
- 51% of the drinkers believed the "Locals" campaign will make more people feel differently about Smithwick's.

Crucially the image of Smithwick's also improved as "a beer people like to be seen drinking" and "a beer people believe is becoming more popular".

Qualitative group research results were also very positive.

**"At last Smithwick's advertising is seen to be developing a consistent*



"Bride" TV.



"Grandad" TV.



"Powercut" TV.



"Pub Quiz" TV.