

# DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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## DEVELOPING MORE COMPELLING CLAIMS

Many brands make the same claims in their marketing communications (i.e., offer the same promise) to their customers year after year. This can be a good thing if the claims are driving customer preference or achieving some other desired behavior (e.g., purchase more frequently). It certainly isn't good if the claims are the same as competitive brands and/or they are not achieving the desired behavior with target customers. If your brand is not sufficiently responding to current claims to provide a meaningful ROI on marketing communications support then it may be a good idea to undergo claims investigation.

### Key Areas for Claims Development

Claims, as delivered in the brand's marketing communications need to compel customer behavior. Among the key claim areas for influencing customer behavior are:

1. **Benefit Promises** – This is usually where marketers look to win customers. Unfortunately, in our “age of sameness” marketers usually settle for promising the same benefit(s) as competitors. Regardless of the superlatives customers see them for what they are - generic category product benefit claims and/or pure puffery.
  - New (different) benefit promises – As an example, the first detergent brand to move away from the promise of “getting clothes cleaner” and move to “make clothes bright” captured consumers' interest and gained a competitive edge. This is not about promising superlatives of the same benefit but offering a different but highly relevant benefit to the target group. It's about changing the dialogue in the marketplace to favor your brand.
  - A new way to serve-up the benefit – If the same benefit promise is used year after year without results then it's probably high time for a change. The message is either not important to customers to stimulate a desired behavior or it is being poorly communicated. This is about making the benefit sound new. It's coming at the customer from another direction to help them discover your advantage. A good example is what VISA did back in 1984 or so. For years they told consumers that VISA was accepted at more locations than AMEX. Big deal? Not really. Many consumers, such as me, were content with patronizing venues where our AMEX was accepted. If it wasn't accepted at a particular outlet or venue then, obviously, the outlet or venue was not in the class of AMEX or befitting its “members.” But VISA changed the perception with the claim “It's everywhere you want to be.” So, don't

bring your AMEX to the Olympics, or Rolling Stone World Tour for that matter, because they don't accept AMEX. This new way to serve-up the benefit put a whole new light on VISA that fueled growth for close to 20-years (until MasterCard identified a new target and provided a new benefit promise).

- A BIG Campaign Idea – This goes beyond the strategic to get at the heart of the execution. As you know, claims are about “what” promises you make; the Campaign Idea is about “how” you communicate it. A relevant, meaningfully differentiated “what” can be either enhanced or retarded depending on whether or not it is communicated via a Campaign Idea – a BIG Campaign Idea. For example, the benefit of Lay's Potato Chips is “irresistible taste.” This is the same benefit for other potato chip brands such as Pringles. But Lays captured market leadership with its campaign “Bet you can't eat just one” which was changed to “No one can eat just one.” It's still burned into our collective consumer minds.

2. **Reason-Why Claims** - Then there's the support for the benefit claims. This is the reason-why or, also called, reason-to-believe. This is not the reason-why the customer should purchase the brand but, instead, why the customer should believe the benefit promise. These are facts and should be incontrovertible if challenged in a court of law. “Prove it” (your benefit claim), bellows the judge as she slams down her gavel. Either you have something real or you don't. Either it is compelling or it is not. Brands with similar benefit claims could gain a competitive advantage through a more compelling reason-why. For example imagine two toothpaste products claim to “get your teeth whiter.” One supports its claim with “clinical studies” while the other supports it with “the ingredient dentists use to whiten teeth.” The likelihood is you would choose the latter support point. Similar to benefit claims the brand might benefit from:

- New reason-why support – This could be the addition of a new ingredient such as “now with Arm & Hammer Baking Powder” to support a teeth whitening benefit. It could be the absence of something “Caffeine-Free; never had it never will.” It could even be a trademark of something to take ownership such as the long-standing “Mountain Grown” for Folger's Coffee. This is about finding something already there in your product, assuming ownership of something that may be common to other products, taking something out, putting something new in, changing formulation or design, making the reason-why visible to consumers or creating something entirely new as CREST did back in the 1950's when they were the first to secure an endorsement from the American Dental Association. This served to help triple the CREST brand's share and gain category leadership, which it held for decades.
- A new way to serve-up the reason-why – Aren't you just sick of hearing “clinical studies prove?” So what? Everybody has clinical studies these days. What makes one brand's citing clinical studies as evidence more compelling than others? Not a thing. It's like wallpaper. It's there but customers don't really hear it. It just doesn't cut through the tsunami of messages customers receive each day. Is there another way of presenting your reason-why? Is there something compelling in those clinical studies that one can use more advantageously? Virtually all the toothbrush brands have features similar to REACH. But did you know that human factors engineers designed

the REACH Toothbrush? They crafted a brush to marry function with consumers. I'm not sure that's how other brushes came about. This might be a way to positionings: "effective, tolerable, and safe"? How can any marketer honestly go with benefits as categoric as these and think she or he is going to market in a competitive fashion? It may not be humanly possible to ensure each brand in the company includes **only** differentiated benefits in its brand positioning. But no brand should go to market without at least one differentiating (real make the REACH Toothbrush promise of cleaner teeth more compelling than competitors – a new way of serving-up the reason-why.

- **BIG Ideas** – Here we come back to the "how." Pepsi did it with its taste challenge versus Coke to prove its taste was not inferior. This was about more than surveys. This was in-market sampling and taste testing. It's hard to ignore Pepsi's claims of great taste if, as a Coca-Cola consumer, you selected Pepsi over Coke in the challenge. Folger's Instant Coffee did it with "the switch" in exclusive restaurants around the US. People ordered their after-dinner coffee expecting to get the house specialty. While they savored it and exclaimed their satisfaction they were told they were drinking instant coffee – Folger's. Then there's DOVE Soap. Remember their "litmus test" test to prove DOVE is milder by far? I do because they sent a bar of DOVE to my home with some litmus paper and invited me to take the test.

Reasons-Why can be either intrinsic or extrinsic to the product. When you have both they can work extremely well to give you a one-two knockout punch in taking your claims to a higher, more competitive, level. Gatorade is terrific with both their scientifically balanced formula created by trainers for the University of Florida Gator football team that went on to win a championship, to their endorsements from all US professional sports leagues (e.g., NFL, NBA, etc.). That's why they continue to dominate the market.

## **BOATS & HELICOPTERS**

Here are some of the action steps you can take to develop more compelling claims:

- 1. Review of Category and Brand Claims** – This review would consist of an agency presentation of who (i.e., competitive product or brand) is claiming what – both benefit promises and reason-why support. It would also be a good idea to track the category over time – specifically not just where it is today but where it has come from and where we expect it will go.
- 2. R&D Product Analysis** – This may be hard to accept but we find that many marketers don't really know and understand their products. This action step would give everyone a solid grounding in the product in both the absolute and relative to competition. In addition to R&D include clinical researchers and, even, regulatory personnel. Even if the marketers claim to know and understand their products the very dynamic of bringing everyone on the extended brand team together is bound to produce some new insights or ideas.
- 3. Review of Customer Needs** – Marketing research managers can help with this action step. However, this step needs to go beyond just a cataloging of customer needs to

include identification of need gaps and competitive product performance against needs. Moreover, it would be helpful to try go beyond the “here and now” to anticipate future customer and marketplace needs.

4. **Understanding the Target Audience** – This is about defining the target audience customer in a way that reflects and communicates our understanding of her/him. The target audience definition must go beyond mere demographics and category needs to delve into psychographics, attitudes and usage habits. Claims and support must be linked to the target to have any meaning. So this is an important place to spend time.
5. **Identification of the Marketing Objective** – One of the reasons communications fail us is that we don’t know what we want target customers to do (what specific behavior to take). So our claims fail to compel. Specifically they do not seed the attitude that will motivate a behavior. The claims, whether it is benefit claims or reasons-why, must seed an attitude that will generate a predetermined behavior that favors the brand. That’s why it is so important to revisit and link claims with the marketing objective for a specific target.
6. **Development of Campaign Ideas** – Get your agency creative personnel involved early in the marketing communication process. Have the creative team develop very rough campaign ideas (i.e., tissues) to capture express claims and reasons-why within the context of ideas. (The idea is comprised of three parts: the naked idea (or creative concept); core dramatization (a simple sketch); and key copy words. These ideas can and should go beyond traditional communications.) The point here is to use the ideas to help us articulate new claims.
7. **Utilize Marketing Research** – Don’t converge too quickly on claims. Develop a plethora of options. Then, use marketing research design to assess the potential of these alternate claims for the brand.

Don’t stick with claims that don’t work. Develop new claims that will influence customer behavior. Now isn’t that a compelling idea?

Richard Czerniawski & Mike Maloney

**Richard Czerniawski**

.....  
430 Abbotsford Road  
Kenilworth, Illinois 60043  
tel 847.256.8820  
fax 847.256.8847  
.....

Reply to Richard:

[rdczerniawski@cs.com](mailto:rdczerniawski@cs.com) or  
[richardcz@bdn-intl.com](mailto:richardcz@bdn-intl.com)

**Mike Maloney**

.....  
1506 West 13th Street, #17  
Austin, Texas 78703  
tel 512.236.0971  
fax 512.236.0972  
.....

reply to Mike:

[mikewmaloney@cs.com](mailto:mikewmaloney@cs.com) or  
[mikemaloney@bdn-intl.com](mailto:mikemaloney@bdn-intl.com)