

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, April 19, 2009

THE COMPETITIVE STANCE: A TALE OF TWO COMPANIES

Back in the fall of 2002, we issued an edition of *Dispatches* entitled, “The Competitive Stance.” That edition was prompted by a growing trend that we perceived then among more and more marketers who, rather than *aiming to win* with their brands over their competition, were content to simply “gain their fair share...fall within their customers’ evoked set..., or generally be perceived as an acceptable alternative” among other big brands within the class or category. And we consciously used the word “stance” (which suggests a strong posture, as in “standing your ground”) because we really felt that many brands—in merely “settling” for a fair share of some sort (what **is** fair, by the way?) were taking the marketplace lying down.

Actually, the focus of that *Dispatches* was on advertising; and we attempted to show that, more often than not, a brand’s lying down posture can be traced directly to the Creative Brief that preceded the ads. But a brand that is truly taking a competitive stand in the marketplace shows that stance in everything it does. It never misses an opportunity to create the perception of being a better choice. When you think about it, that’s what we marketers get paid to do that others in the organization do not: *to get our customers-consumers to prefer our brand because they see it as a better choice.* We marketers must, therefore, always ensure our brands maintain a competitive stance.

This whole subject came to mind a couple of weekends ago as we were leafing through the weekly coupon inserts in the Sunday newspaper. Free-standing, promotional inserts like these have been around forever in the U.S market. For a long time there were two or three national suppliers who would take orders from wide range of companies for coupon-ads in their inserts; more recently, though, major fast-moving goods companies have found it more effective and efficient to provide their own exclusive inserts. So today we have the *P&G Brand Saver*, for example, which features only Procter & Gamble brands. But other companies also have their version—on this particular weekend one of the other packaged goods giants, Unilever, fielded their *Making Life Better* insert. To get to the point, there was a stunning difference in the competitive stances taken by brands in these two inserts: P&G’s was loaded with claims of differentiation (either versus previous line items or versus a competitive product of some kind); whereas Unilever’s contained virtually no claims or bases for preference at all. In short, for a consumer flipping through both inserts, there was no doubt about why they should choose a P&G brand offering.

Rather than belabor in extended paragraphs these obvious differences in competitive stance, for this week’s Boats & Helicopters we have tabulated the brands in each insert along with the body-copy/bases for preference in each. Take a look for yourselves. See if you don’t agree that the P&G brands, in general, never miss a chance to take a competitive stance—even in a simple

promotional editorial context like weekly coupon inserts. We'll follow the tabulations with a few closing comments.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS

P&G Brand Saver versus Unilever Making Life Better)

P&G BRAND	BODY COPY
1. Always Infinity	"Made with infinicel that absorbs 10x its weight."
2. Pampers Splashers	"Fits snug and won't swell up in water like regular diapers."
3. Cheer Bright Clean	"Now surprisingly bright in just one wash."
4. Downy Renewing Scent Pearls	"3x longer lasting freshness and up to 33% more loads."
5. Cascade Complete & Dawn Direct Foam	"Powerful cleaning, even on the light cycle so you can save 1.1 gallons of water per load"; and "2xmore grease fighting...use 1.6 less gallons of water vs. traditional dish liquid."
6. Gillette Series	"Up to 35% better razor glide."
7. Gillette Fusion Power	"Fresh blade. Better shave."
8. Olay Professional ProX	"Clinically proven results in 28 days. Guaranteed."
9. Secret Flawless Clear	"Your choice is clear. 50% more uses than before."
10. Crest Pro-Health	"Helps stop irreversible enamel loss before it happens."

UNILEVER BRAND	BODY COPY
1. Breyers Ice Cream	“Dig into a delicious Breyer’s hot fudge sundae.”
2. Bertolli Pasta Sauce	“Restaurant quality Italian in the comfort of your home...only the finest ingredients are used to create our premium pouches and traditional savory sauces.”
3. Lipton Recipe Secrets	“In the family for generations. On the plate of minutes.”
4. Caress Skin Wear	“Make your skin the ultimate fashion statement.”
5. Q-Tips Beauty	“Res-Q your routine.”
6. Country Crock	“Quality ingredients. Ready in just 5 minutes.”
7. Dove Body Wash	“Show your skin the wonders of juicy goodness.”
8. Skippy Peanut Butter	“Skippy Peanut Butter is NOT part of the peanut recall. Skippy places the highest priority on product quality and safety.”
9. Slim-Fast Optima	“Help crush cravings for up to 4 hours.”

The differences between these two companies in their claims (or lack thereof) are pretty striking, wouldn't you agree? On the one hand, we have a series of well-known Unilever brands basically reasserting their commitment to quality and goodness—the implication is that they remain a “trusted, good option” among other choices; on the other we have a non-stop barrage of P&G brands hammering home the *differences* that their brands offer...either versus “ordinary” choices or versus their previous versions. Notice, too, that P&G marketers continue to do what they have historically done to give consumers reasons for choosing their brands over competitive options: trademarked ingredients or design features (like Infinicel); a measurable degree of performance (like 10x); and tangible value-added (like 33% more loads).

We can't speak for everyone, but in these days of perceived "sameness" in consumer goods and of "class effect" in prescription drug brand performance, we would sure prefer to take the competitive stance over the "acceptable option" one any day. How about you?

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*Please forward any comments regarding the newsletter to Lori Vandervoort at our Central Division Offices of BDN International, 800-255-9831 or 620-431-0780.
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