

Radio campaign combines reach/frequency strategy and memorable creative to grow sales volume and awareness for import brand

Strategically-placed radio commercials and a memorable creative "schtick" have helped this imported premium brand build market share and attract a wide-range of appreciative Canadian beer enthusiasts.

BACKGROUND

Grolsch is recognized worldwide for its superior quality and smooth, distinctive taste. It has been brewed in Holland since 1615 where it is the number one premium beer brand. Grolsch products are distributed internationally from a state-of-the-art brewery in Holland where strict controls on quality and taste profile are maintained.

The brand is available in major distribution channels, bars and restaurants in every province across Canada. But prior to 2004, there was no advertising for Grolsch in this country. Up until then, its niche in the market was driven by word-of-mouth and a sales team getting it on the retail shelf and in licensed establishments.

Without advertising, Grolsch experienced slight year-over-year incremental growth, but brand equity and awareness stalled. Consumers knew it was a premium beer from somewhere in Europe and some recognized it as the beer in the iconic swing-top bottle. Overall there was very little knowledge about Grolsch and its ranking in comparison with other imported brands.

MARKETING OBJECTIVES

Grolsch was going to gain any appreciable sales in Canada. Proud of its heritage, consistency, and innovation, Grolsch wanted to convey its unique attributes and authenticity to consumers. With Ontario as its primary focus, increasing brand awareness and trial would also aid Grolsch's efforts to widen distribution channels and gain acceptance with licensees. The company's short-term goal was to grow sales by 10% in key markets.

Grolsch identified its key consumers to be males aged 25 to 34 with a secondary group extending up to age 54. Reaching them promised to be a real challenge since these demographics were long-time targets of the other more practiced players in the market.

The beer category in Canada is an extremely competitive one populated by high-powered domestic brands, homegrown craft brewers, and imported beers from around the world - many of them with advertising budgets large enough for sustained mass-marketing campaigns. That was something Grolsch didn't have.

In 2004, Grolsch turned to Toronto-based doug agency for its strategic thinking and creative expertise.

RADIO'S ROLE WITHIN THE MEDIA STRATEGY

The creative strategy calling for a focus on the unique aspects and characteristics of Grolsch spawned a tagline that says it all - "It could only be Grolsch."

Creatively, the agency leveraged the unique attributes of the Grolsch brand by looking no further than its name. The media plan provided a similar challenge. The criteria for the media strategy was to build reach and provide awareness close to place of purchase while adhering to a cost-effective approach.

For its inaugural advertising effort, Grolsch wanted to expand its awareness in Ontario. To achieve client objectives, it was decided that the media plan would need to narrow its geographical scope to Toronto and place advertising during the key summer months when beer consumption is at its peak.

Radio was chosen as the primary medium because of its ability to build reach and frequency as well its portability and targeting capabilities.

The agency and partners Gaggi Media delivered a media plan that allowed Grolsch to zero in on its target groups via a choice of stations appealing to multiple demographics. With time-of-day and day-of-week scheduling, it connects with consumers in the evening on their way home from work and on weekends. Buys are heaved up on weekends and particularly on long weekends when so much of the population heads out of the town. With that in mind, a cottage country radio station was added to the schedule for the second year of the campaign so as they moved beyond the range of Toronto stations, drivers could still be reached with Grolsch advertising.

Outdoor was selected as the support medium to aid top-of-mind awareness through placements close to point-of-purchase locations. The idea was to reinforce messages in the radio spots with Grolsch boards as consumers approach Ontario Beer Stores and LCBO outlets.

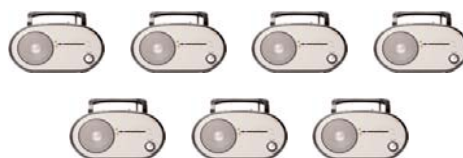
The memorable creative has been a major factor in the success of Grolsch's advertising efforts. The use of audio mnemonics such as the "popping" sound of a swing-top bottle being opened and the "sch" in the pronunciation of words other than Grolsch created a unique and easily recognized identity for the brand.

The creative "schtick" provided the right touches of humour that not only appealed to listeners but also helped extend the brand connection when picked by radio announcers during Grolsch promos.

High production values and choice of talent added punch - and authenticity - to the delivery of the cleverly written scripts. It certainly didn't hurt that the main character is Dutch and even from the town in Holland where Grolsch is brewed.

With heavy frequency throughout the summer months, several executions were needed to keep the creative fresh and communicate multiple brand benefits. Each one focused on a single key attribute of Grolsch with 3 Radio commercials and 4 outdoor messages created for the first year of the campaign. The number of Radio spots doubled to 6 for the 2005 campaign.

Click to hear spots:



RESULTS

Grolsch is extremely happy with the results of its Canadian campaigns since sales volume has grown well beyond the expected 10%. Aided by the entire brand mix - from on-premise work and diligent sales execution to limited-time offers - radio has helped generate above target brand awareness and sales growth in key markets. From humble sales figures in 1999, when Grolsch sold only 90,000 cases of beer in Canada, the recent marketing initiatives pushed volume to over 500,000 cases annually in 2005.

The impact of the advertising on brand awareness, equity, image and usage has also been outstanding. At the end of the 2004 campaign, an Ipsos Reid pre- and post-advertising study found that brand awareness increased fivefold, a remarkable surge mainly attributed to the Radio campaign.

To compile the data, Ipsos Reid surveyed members of the consumer target group and found increases in brand usage and most other brand health measures. Brand image of sociability, perceived drinkability and youthfulness, as well as brand equity - perceived popularity, relevance and familiarity with the brand, all increased by significant amounts following the advertising campaign.

Overall, awareness of the Grolsch brand was at similar levels as the big-spending imports after its first year of radio advertising.

Grolsch plans to continue its radio advertising and will be expanding its budget and the geographical scope of the campaign as its business grows.

"We are very pleased with the advertising campaign developed by the doug agency. The radio skits are humorous, memorable, and uniquely identified with the Grolsch brand, resulting in awareness numbers well beyond our expectations. Grolsch 'schpeak' has become part of the landscape."

Jerry Biggar, President, Grolsch Canada