

Cassies 2006 Cases

Brand/Case: Listerine

Winner: Sustained Success—Gold

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Crossover Notes: All winning cases contain lessons that cross over from one case to another. David Rutherford has been identifying these as Crossover Notes since Cassies 1997. The full set for Cassies 2006 can be downloaded from the Case Library section at www.cassies.ca

- Crossover Note 1. What a Brand Stand For.
- Crossover Note 2. Brand Truths.
- Crossover Note 6. Should the Product be Improved?
- Crossover Note 10. Conventional Wisdom—should it be challenged?
- Crossover Note 12. Changing the Goalposts.
- Crossover Note 22. Humour in a Serious Category.
- Crossover Note 26. Awareness Alone.

To see creative, go to the Case Library Index and click on the additional links beside the case.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Business Results Period (Consecutive Months): 1999 - 2006
Start of Advertising/Communication Effort: 1999
Base Period for Comparison: Historical data

Listerine had been the brand that "kills the germs that cause bad breath" for over 126 years, but it was not doing especially well. As the oral health care landscape began to evolve in the late 1990s, there was an opportunity to re-position Listerine into a much more important role than breath freshening. It would not, however, be easy.

There were entrenched images and habits to overcome, and the case shows how we broke down these barriers.

Most recently, Listerine won a Cassies in 2002 for the initial re-positioning of the mother brand, and the line extension Pocket Paks. The success that started then continues to impress years later and show no signs of slowing down.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Listerine had thrived on its reputation as the brand that "kills the germs that cause bad breath." [Crossover Note 1.](#)

In the 1980s, however, it lost market leadership to Scope and private labels. People saw little difference (except for taste) between products. Compounding this, Listerine was seen as cold, old-fashioned, authoritarian, serious, and stuffy — a Margaret Thatcher. In the 1990s, there were many attempts at re-positioning, with little success. Listerine continued to falter, and a drastic overhaul was needed. [Crossover Note 6.](#)

At the time, perceptions of oral health care were beginning to shift from something that was managed at the dentist, to something you could control at home. Mostly, this centred on maintaining healthy and strong teeth, and preventing cavities and plaque. This did not mean, however, that people were forgetting about their gums. In fact, when surveyed, the majority of Canadians said that they would be very concerned if they had the symptoms of gum disease. As gum health began to enter people's consciousness, they looked for toothpastes with gum-health benefits, and brushes that twisted and span. They also increasingly began to use floss.

After decades of "killing germs that cause bad breath," was a radical repositioning possible? [Crossover Note 10.](#)

STRATEGY AND INSIGHT

A full 4 of 5 Canadians told us that they would be very or somewhat concerned if they had receding or swollen gums. And Listerine had clinicals to prove its effectiveness against gingivitis. [Crossover Note 2.](#)

So healthy gums was a compelling and potentially ownable benefit. But it wouldn't be easy. It wasn't just a question of changing perceptions about Listerine. We had to change deep-seated beliefs about mouthwashes as well. [Crossover Note 12](#).

Phase 1: 1999 – 2002

Objective: Change what the brand stands for

The target was Therapy Seekers: adults (characteristically 25 – 39) who were optimistic about their health and wanted to take charge of it. They were using toothpaste to keep their teeth strong and floss to minimize plaque. But how should the story be told?

The Margaret Thatcher image had to be buried forever. But consumers have been trained to equate seriousness with therapeutic strength. [Crossover Note 22](#). How could we persuade people that we were a serious gingivitis medicine if the advertising was light-hearted? The answer came from comic books. As every aficionado knows, the action hero, while animated and fun, has super powers that conquer evil.

Listerine. The action hero for your gums.

As a tongue-in-cheek send-up, it resolved the oxymoron of light-hearted and powerful. It was fun and playful - *and* effective therapy for gums - all at the same time.

Consumers were listening. Sales responded, and Listerine's "Helps fight Gingivitis" rating went from 44% to 78%. (See Business Results later.) The next challenge was to become as essential to oral health care as the toothbrush.

Phase 2: 2003 – 2005

Objective: Change behaviour. Integrate Listerine into the daily oral health routine.

By 2003, Listerine's gingivitis reputation had been solidified. However, Listerine was still being used as an occasional remedy. [Crossover Note 26](#).

We needed to create urgency around gingivitis. Twice daily brushing was seen as the gold standard, and we had to shake up the perception that this keeps you safe from gingivitis. Listerine had to become part of the routine, but it was critical not to preach. So Toothbrush Guy joined the Action Hero to create:

The Clean Team = Brush + Listerine

We also added powerful claims.

- *Listerine after brushing is just as effective as flossing for fighting gingivitis*
- *Listerine after brushing eliminates more germs that cause gingivitis than brushing alone*

EXECUTION

Phase 1: 1999 - 2002

The campaign launched in Spring 1999, with multiple touch-points. The Action Hero idea was introduced in the TV spot “Video Section.” A guy stocks Listerine in the Action Hero section of the video store because Listerine is an action hero – for gums.



The magic then happened with “Costume Party.” A guy shows up at a costume party as a bottle of Listerine, touting its gingivitis fighting power. Print looked like an Action Hero movie poster. Media was creative—in the movie section of newspapers and magazines, and, of course, in movie theatres. We also knocked on dentists' doors, and developed an Action Hero Internet game. The message was serious, but the delivery was light-hearted and approachable.

By Year 3 of the campaign, our Action Hero was intent on his mission to fight the evil gingivitis.

In “Adam West” our ordinary guy, dressed in his Listerine costume, confronts Adam West, the original Batman actor. Our guy wants to be Batman's sidekick.



In Year 4, our hero's passion for his mission has infiltrated his sub-conscious in “Animated Dream.” In this over-the-top dramatization, an anthropomorphized Listerine battles the Evil Gingivitis. But wait! It's just our ordinary guy, dreaming on a bus, dressed as a Listerine bottle.

We also had direct mail to dental professionals. It elicited 20,000 responses from dentists and hygienists across Canada.

Phase 2: 2003 - 2005

In 2003, our hero teams up with Toothbrush Guy. And so the “Clean Team” is born. In “A Brush with Listerine,” we find a neat way to communicate our “better than brushing alone” claim and link it to daily oral care.

“Clean Force 2” movie posters and print also introduced the dynamic duo, and from this point forward, the two characters are inseparable.



In 2004’s “Floss Guy,” the Clean Team meet Floss who offers to join them in their quest.

It's not pleasant, but they have to break the bad news to him - Floss has a reputation of being time-consuming and difficult.

Fortunately, they don’t need his help this time.

The 2005 “Gym” features the Clean Team again, building muscle to prepare for the fight against Evil Gingivitis.

Additionally, the Toothbrush’s absurd yet endearing attempt to flirt with two female gym members (“I like to do it two, even three times a day... call me!”) gives us a fun reinforcement of Listerine’s recommended twice daily usage.



BUSINESS RESULTS

Phase 1: 1999 – 2002. Changing what the brand stood for.

Brand Image

Ratings for “helps fight gingivitis” increased from 44% in 1999 to 78% in 2002. Other key measures of brand image were also significantly improved, while the corresponding Scope ratings all went down:

Exhibit A. Brand Image Ratings: Listerine vs. Scope (1999 & 2002)

Brand Image Ratings	Listerine		Scope	
	1999	2002	1999	2002
Helps fight gingivitis	44%	78%	36%	35%
Promotes a healthy mouth	52%	81%	55%	51%
Kills germs in your mouth	58%	83%	58%	37%
Is the only brand for me	27%	56%	40%	37%

Source: Ipsos-ASI Ad Tracking Data

Brand Impact

Past 3 month usage and purchase intent ratings saw significant gains for Listerine between 1999 and 2002, while Scope saw declines.

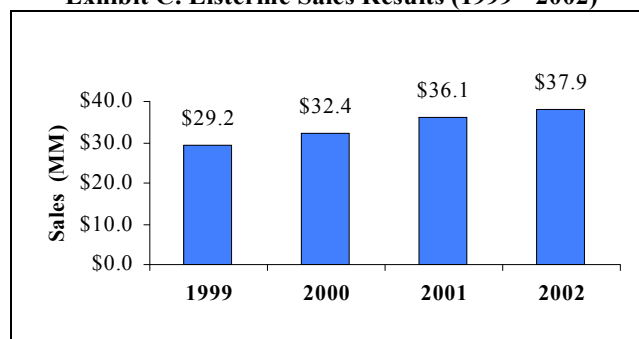
Exhibit B. Brand Impact Ratings: Listerine vs. Scope (1999 & 2002)

Brand Impact Ratings	Listerine		Scope	
	1999	2002	1999	2002
Past 3 month usage	51%	61%	49%	38%
Purchase intent	61%	67%	58%	46%

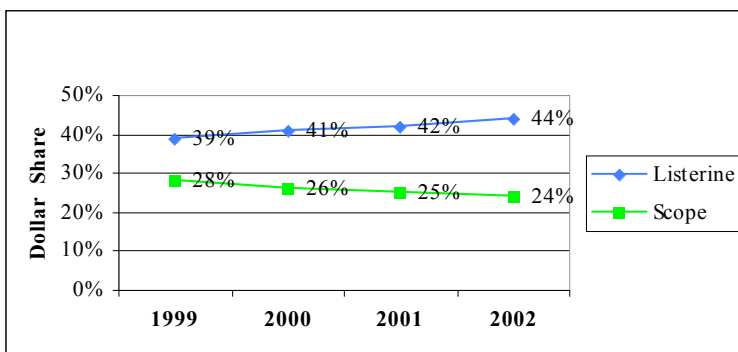
Source: Ipsos-ASI Ad Tracking Data

Business Results

Sales of Listerine grew 30% from \$29.2MM in 1999 to \$37.9MM in 2002.

Exhibit C. Listerine Sales Results (1999 - 2002)

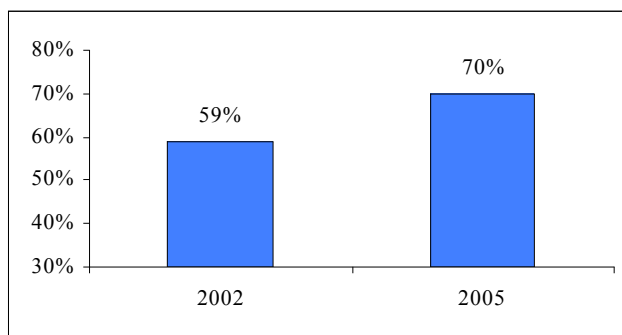
Share results were similarly impressive with strong growth in Listerine's dollar share at the expense of Scope.

Exhibit D. Dollar Share: Listerine vs. Scope (1999 – 2002)

Source: AC Nielsen Market Track Data

Phase 2: 2003 – 2005. Changing usage.**Usage and Attitudes**

Listerine users reporting “at least once a day” usage increased from 59% in 2002 to 70% in 2005. Moreover, 66% of mouthwash users now agree that Listerine is part of their brushing routine.

Exhibit E. Listerine users reporting “at least once a day” usage (2002 & 2005)**Brand Image**

While commitment to the routine increased, the campaign also continued to reinforce brand image perceptions for Listerine.

Exhibit F. Brand Image Ratings: Listerine vs. Scope (2003 & 2005)

Brand Image Ratings	Listerine		Scope	
	2003	2005	2003	2005
Helps fight gingivitis	80%	83%	32%	31%
Promotes a healthy mouth	79%	80%	46%	45%
Kills germs in your mouth	79%	83%	40%	32%
Is the only brand for me	55%	56%	41%	38%

Source: Ipsos-ASI Ad Tracking Data

Brand Impact

Brand impact also showed sustained gains for Listerine while Scope continued to suffer.

Exhibit G. Brand Impact Ratings: Listerine vs. Scope (2003 & 2005)

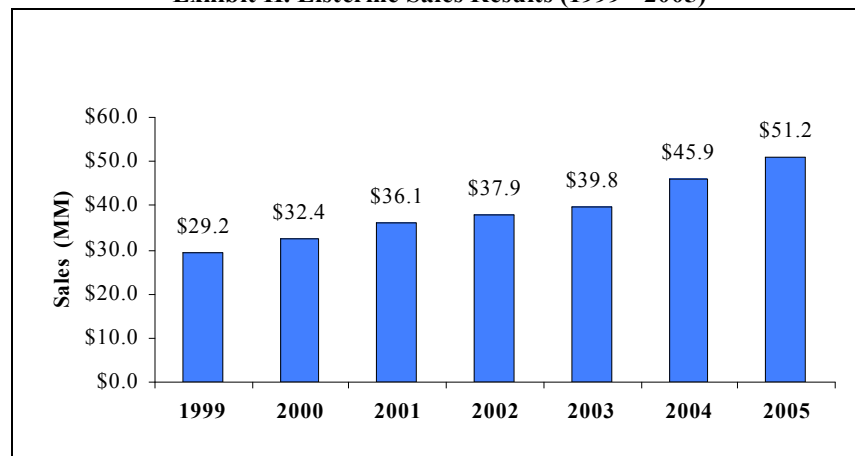
Brand Impact Ratings	Listerine		Scope	
	2003	2005	2003	2005
Past 3 month usage	59%	64%	42%	37%
Purchase intent	71%	73%	53%	47%

Source: Ipsos-ASI Ad Tracking Data

Business Results

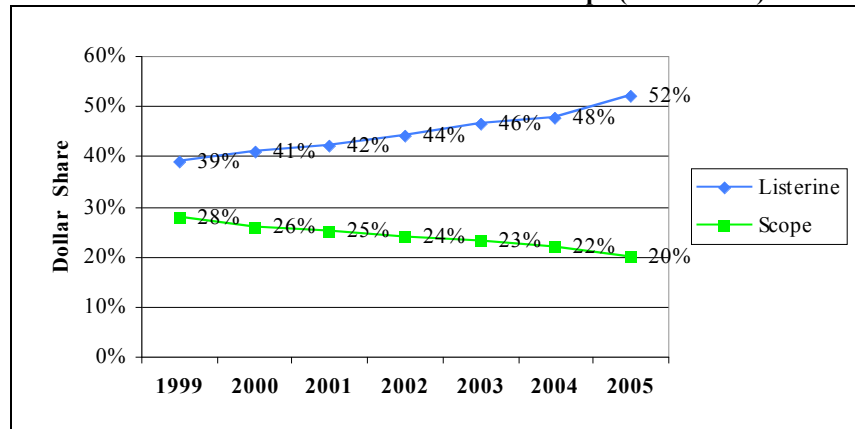
Sales grew an additional 29% from \$39.8MM in 2003 to \$51.2MM in 2005 – an increase of over 75% since the launch of the Action Hero campaign 7 years earlier in 1999

Exhibit H. Listerine Sales Results (1999 - 2005)



Likewise, Listerine continued to widen the share gap with Scope..

Exhibit I. Dollar Share: Listerine vs. Scope (1999 - 2005)



Source: AC Nielsen Market Track Data

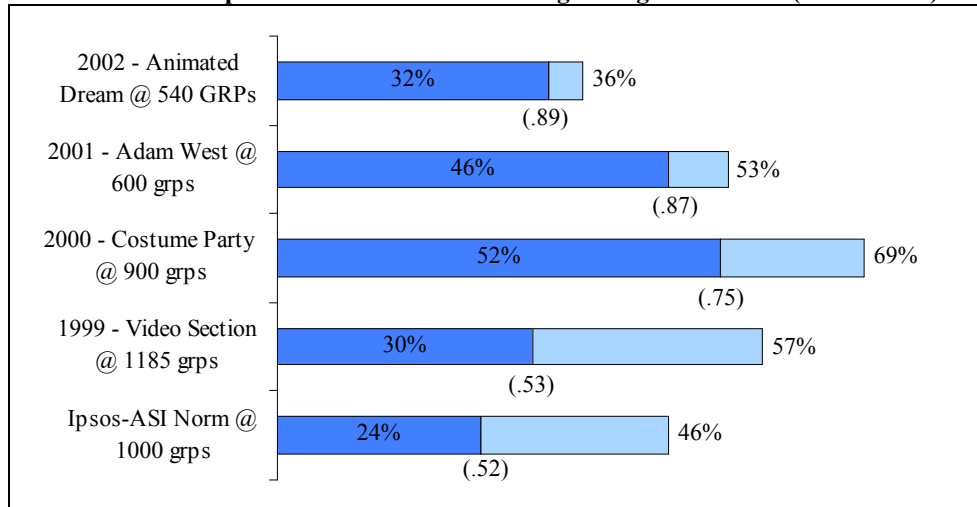
CAUSE AND EFFECT BETWEEN ADVERTISING AND RESULTS

Phase 1: 1999 - 2002

Ad Tracking

The Action Hero campaign tracked extremely well for Listerine with brand link consistently scoring above norm.

Exhibit J. Prompted Recall and Brand Linkage - English Canada (1999 - 2002)

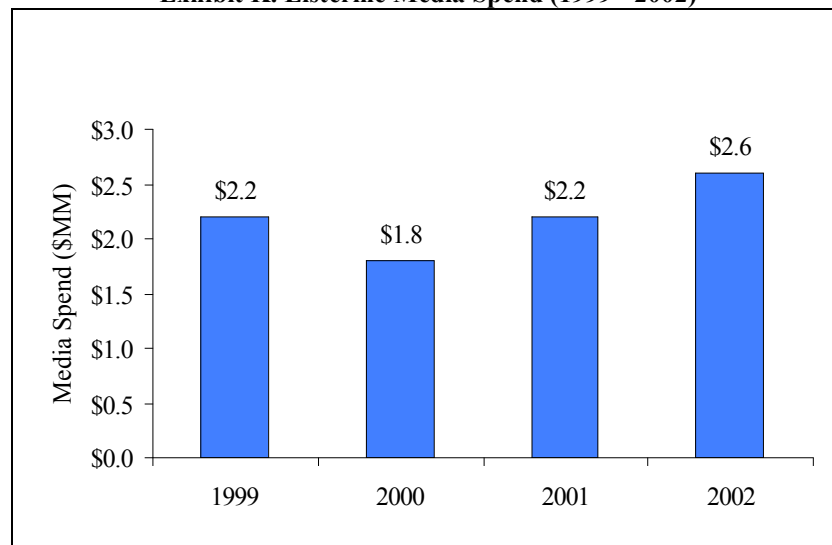


Source: Ipsos-ASI Ad Tracking Data

Media Expenditure

Results were obtained with fairly level media investments across all four years.

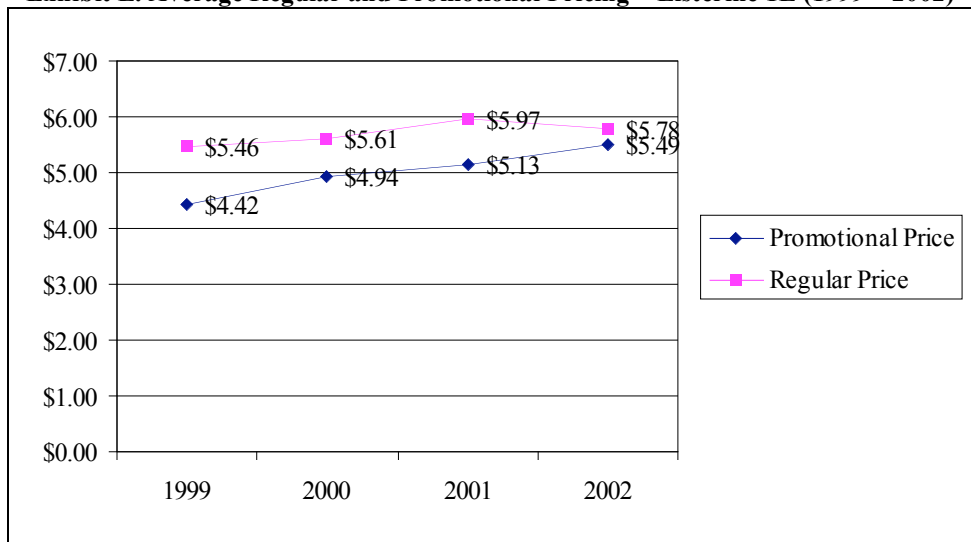
Exhibit K. Listerine Media Spend (1999 - 2002)



Pricing

There were no significant price reductions between 1999 and 2002. Indeed, the difference between average regular and promotional pricing decreased during this period, from an average discount of \$1.04 in 1999 to only \$0.29 in 2002.

Exhibit L. Average Regular and Promotional Pricing – Listerine 1L (1999 – 2002)



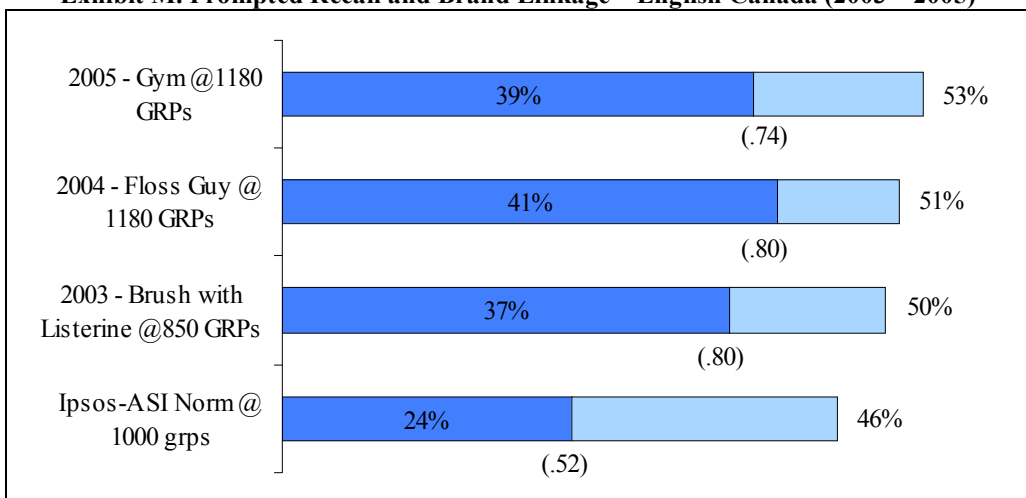
Source: AC Nielsen

Phase 2: 2003 - 2005

Ad Tracking

Phase 2 of the campaign continued to track extremely well with prompted recall scores meeting and exceeding norms. As well, brand link was consistently above norm.

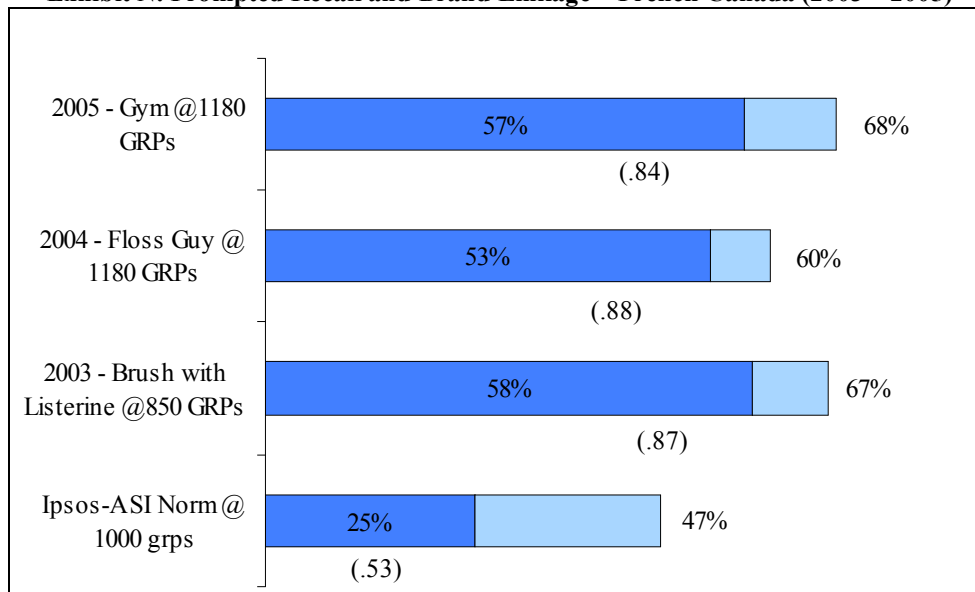
Exhibit M. Prompted Recall and Brand Linkage – English Canada (2003 – 2005)



Source: Ipsos-ASI Ad Tracking Data

Of note, the results in Quebec were astonishing. Although that campaign was begun in Quebec a few years later than it was in English Canada, the Quebecois couldn't get enough of our action hero.

Exhibit N. Prompted Recall and Brand Linkage – French Canada (2003 – 2005)

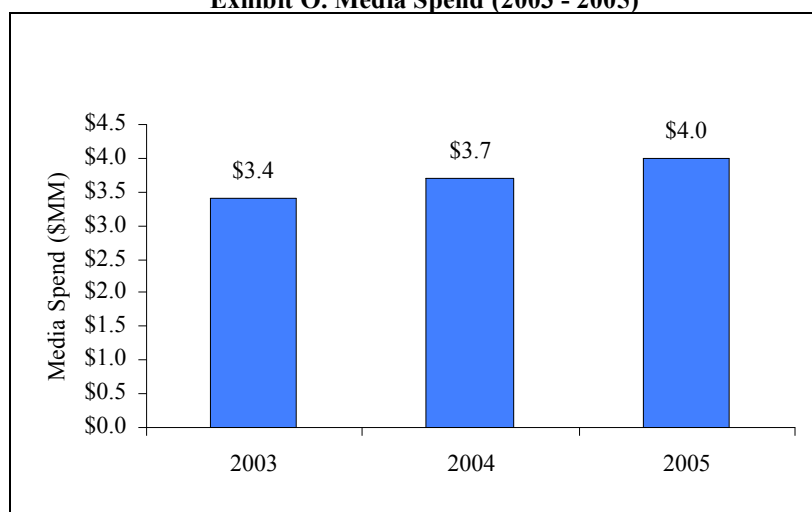


Source: Ipsos-ASI Ad Tracking Data

Media Expenditure

Results were obtained with only small increases in media spend across the 3 years.

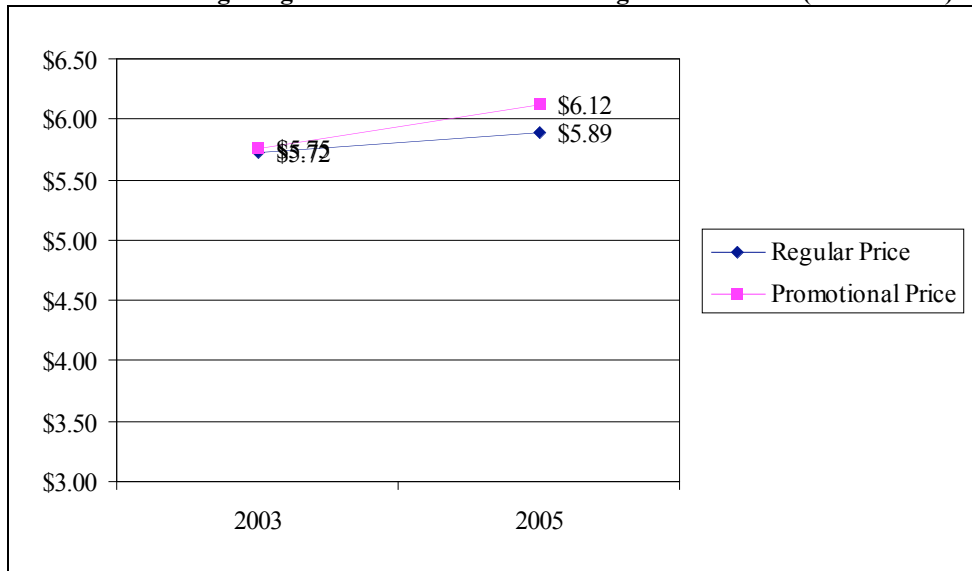
Exhibit O. Media Spend (2003 - 2005)



Pricing

As with Phase 1, Phase 2 did not see any significant price reductions. The average promotional prices over this period were flat (\$5.72 in 2003, \$5.75 in 2005).

Exhibit P. Average Regular and Promotional Pricing – Listerine 1L (1999 – 2002)



Source: AC Nielsen