

Agency: D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles

Authors: P Belanger, S Tushinski and L Lucas

'Always' Campaign

INTRODUCTION

How do you use television to sell a product you cannot show? You cannot even talk about the product except euphemistically, alluding to how it works using metaphors and visual similes. And it gets worse! You know that vast members of the audience, and even your target market, are uncomfortable with your message - no matter what you say or do.

These are the background restraints that affect the feminine hygiene product market and its advertising.

The Always case is a good example of how an advertiser was able to work within these parameters and still create such a memorable and effective campaign that the brand went from product launch to capturing 50 per cent of its market in two years.

Always makes a convincing case about identifying a key product advantage and creating an effective way of getting that message to the target audience. It also demonstrates the value of listening to what the customer thinks and feels, particularly in a sensitive area such as this.

At the time when Always was introduced, its main competitors - Stayfree, New Freedom and Carefree - used 'lifestyle' advertising, linking the product usage to consumer end-benefits such as more confidence, feeling feminine and so on. But Procter & Gamble's research had consistently shown that women were actually responding negatively to lifestyle benefits associated with feminine hygiene. The message they were getting was that a more intelligent (less patronizing) focus on specific product category benefits would provide greater appeal to women. The message, in other words, was: 'Quit trying to pretend my life will change if I use this product; tell me the facts in a tasteful way.' The case stands as an example of using research to 'listen between the lines' to discover what customers want and need - not just in the product features themselves, but also in the message advertising sends to them.

Finally, the Always case shows how effective advertising is when it comes to getting the message out about new product innovations and developments. Product differentiation always has been and always will be a key role of good advertising.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study demonstrates the success behind Procter and Gamble's 1985 launch into the feminine hygiene beltless-pad market with the introduction of the Always brand and the significant contribution advertising has made to its success in this market category.

Latest market share figures show Always with almost half the Canadian market. Not only has Always become the leading brand in Canada since its introduction seven years ago, but it has also experienced continuous growth year after year.

Key creative elements of the Canadian advertising campaign have been adapted or used unaltered in virtually every other country around the world where Always is marketed.

The advertising demonstrates the following principles:

- Advertising can clearly differentiate in a crowded market. The unique product performance, presented in a sensitive manner, gave us a competitive advantage against strong, well-established competitors;
- In areas considered sensitive (such as feminine hygiene), advertising- if it is to be both effective and appreciated by consumers - needs to be based on insights that come only from extensive consumer research;
- Media must be used creatively if it is to work to advantage, particularly in a category in which mass TV advertising is strictly regulated and limited;
- While working in partnership with regulatory boards, it was possible to develop a very strong and effective message to the consumer.

Always was launched in 1985 into an already well-established competitive and highly sensitive market. Its key competitors were Johnson & Johnson and Kimberly-Clark, two of the best marketers in the world. The Always product provided a new kind of feminine hygiene protection in the form of new technology - a top sheet called 'Dry Weave' that was added to the makeup of the pad.

The advertising campaign focused on the benefits of this new material and created an ownable, unique positioning of Clean/Dry Protection. Research indicates that Always has achieved almost 100-per-cent ever-tried levels and has the only image for superior protection in the category. Advertising awareness levels are also the strongest in the category. This success has come at the expense of our key competitors.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Before the introduction of Always, the beltless-pad market was roughly divided equally by two major competitors, Johnson & Johnson and Kimberly-Clark. These two formidable marketers had decades of experience in the beltless-pad market, not only in Canada but also around the world. At the time, they marketed the most advanced products and had created an image through advertising, not only for their products but also for the category.

It is important to note that overall consumer attitudes towards feminine hygiene advertising were negative, due to a perceived taste issue. Part of the problem at the time was the extensive use of 'lifestyle' approaches to convey a product benefit. Women were being told about acquiring more 'confidence' and 'feeling feminine,' as well as being able to wear light, tight clothing and so on. Moreover, there was, and still is, a fine line between what is acceptable and what is considered to be in poor taste especially related to demonstrations of the product's effectiveness. These points had to be considered before developing the launch campaign.

Before launching the Always brand, DMD&B identified three key challenges that would have to be faced in order to be successful.

TRIAL BEHAVIOUR

Through our research we discovered that the barrier to trial was 'risk of accidents.' The reason women didn't try new products in this category was one of credibility of product performance. The risks associated with product/brand switching were so great on an emotional level that women basically stayed with the routine they were used to - minimizing accidents and maximizing protection. The subject matter was so private that women would make up their own system or routine of protection - whether it involved using different pads at different times or even physically cutting and pasting pads to satisfy their needs - rather than venturing out into unknown product territory.

The advertising, therefore, not only had to communicate and demonstrate absolute superior protection but it also had to provide a strong, credible 'reason why' before women would even consider risking trial.

CONSUMER RESISTANCE

Due to the incredibly private nature of the product category, how you talk to the consumer becomes almost as important as what you say. Research showed that because of the taboo nature of this product area, it is also a relatively low interest one. As stated before, women got used to their 'make-do' routines and stuck with them. And, they were not used to advertisers talking to them about these products and their benefits. Previous category advertising used concepts of 'Freedom' depicted by women walking down beaches, riding horses and so on. Our research, however, also showed that even though this was recognized as a sensitive subject area, women felt that current advertising formats didn't give them enough information about the products.

The advertising that would work, we realized, would be advertising that achieved the perfect balance of product information that was presented in a tasteful way and that was sensitive to the negative feelings women were expressing.

ADVERTISING STANDARDS COUNCIL (ASC)

A special board was set up by advertisers as an advertising 'watchdog' for the category. Its main function was to review the proposed advertising and assess its potential offensiveness to the consumer. When we launched the brand, manufacturers were not allowed to show their product on television. By working in partnership with the council over time, we are now able to show a full pad. Increasing consumer acceptance of feminine hygiene advertising has led to abandonment of pre-clearance of this category by the ASC.

STRATEGY AND EXECUTION

1. THE PRODUCT

The Always product incorporates a new form of product technology which is a unique topsheet for the pad called 'Dry Weave.' Preliminary market research showed that women preferred Always to any other brand tested because it did provide 'better protection'; clearly an important benefit in the category.

2. THE STRATEGY

As a result, Always was positioned as the brand that would offer superior protection. We went further by highlighting the type of protection women could expect. We used the descriptors 'clean and dry' to emphasize the type of unique protection the product provided. Research showed that women want not only 'protection' from accidents, but also a dry comfortable feeling while wearing the product. Our unique topsheet 'Dry Weave' provided the opportunity to qualify our protection through the positioning 'superior clean/dry protection.'

In copy development, our 'reason why,' was the ability of the new 'Dry Weave' topsheet to pull wetness away from the surface of the pad leaving the surface clean and dry.

The brand character also became very important. How we would project the brand and how we would talk to women was as important as what we said. We wanted the brand to reflect a feeling of confidence and understanding of a woman's needs.

The proposition for the brand became:

'Always is the pad that provides superior clean dry protection better than any other pad because of its Dry Weave topsheet.'

Over the past seven years, our strategic focus has not changed. We continue to put pressure on our competition by consistently demonstrating our superiority.

3. THE EXECUTION

The challenge, from an execution point of view, was to develop advertising that focused on our unique product

difference while being sensitive to women's feelings and also abide by the ASC guidelines. For the initial launch campaign we demonstrated our superior protection message through a focus on the unique 'Dry Weave' topsheet. Since at that time, we could not show a full pad we decided to show the material and use that as the focus of our demonstration on television. With a close-up of the material we were able to prove our unique point of difference to the consumer. Over the years we have worked with the ASC and can now show a full pad demonstration on television.

Initially, we were not able to show the product and so the imagery we used became an integral part of how we delivered our strategy. Our launch campaign began to build an image for the brand. We utilized the colours blue and white to reflect a clean/dry image that no other competitor could deliver.

In addition, we selected specific icons for the brand that would come to symbolize the superior type of protection a woman would get from Always. The first icon was a dove, representing a clean and natural feeling for the brand. Over the years, the dove's role has changed in emphasis, from a main focus at the campaign's beginning to the quick trademark equity used today. The second icon was the Always woman. We worked to define what we felt to be an 'aspirational' image that would also provide us with the halo of superiority. The character of the Always woman has remained constant over the years. She has evolved from a silent symbol to today's depiction of a confident, open, empathetic character able to talk to other women on a one-to-one level.

Our media selection helped deliver our objectives of demonstrating superiority by providing the opportunity to tailor different messages for television and print. Since we were unable to show the product on television, we selected magazines as our secondary medium. In print, a more private medium, we proved explicitly our performance superiority over the competition. We have continued to utilize print to provide women with an in-depth understanding of our product benefits.

ADVERTISING VARIABLES

Through the campaign's duration Always maintained a share of voice (SOV) that remained consistent and in line with its growing market share. Another major competitor, Kimberly-Clark also maintained an average SOV consistent with its share performance. It tended to skew media buying more heavily into print and has maintained a leading SOV in that medium.

THE RESULTS

1. SHARE

Since the national roll-out of Always in 1985, the market share has grown consistently, capturing nearly half of the beltless-pad market in 1992. This growth has been continual and relentless. We have never given up the focus on our strategic principles and have seen the rewards year after year ([Figure 1](#)). The growth in our first year was so outstanding that we saw our competition lose at double digit rates. The competition has never recovered.

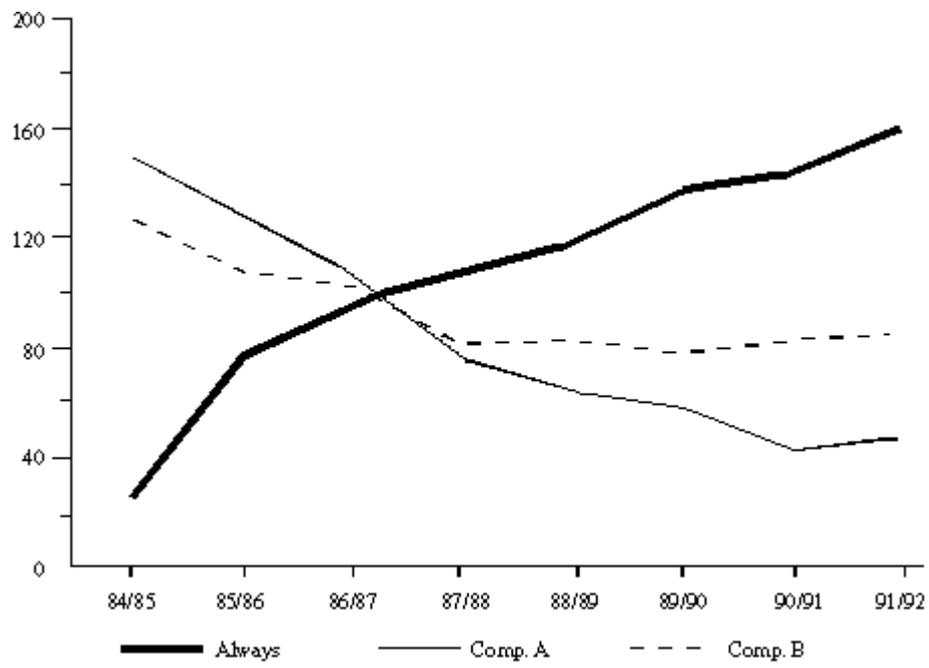
Worldwide, our Canadian share continues to be the strongest. The campaign was twice as successful as those in the United States and Japan - which launched on similar timing. The only major difference in marketing among the countries has been the advertising. As a result, P&G is now using proven Canadian creative elements and this strategy with similar success in other regions in which it markets Always.

2. CONSUMER FEEDBACK

Studies show that we have built an image for superior protection and dryness. Additionally, 'Dry Weave' is mentioned in every major piece of research we conduct. Our competitors have no strongholds in these areas.

LETTERS

Since our launch we have received thousands of letters praising not only the product but also the advertising. The consumer letters are a direct reflection of the advertising messages we air. Some examples are:



All brands in the PBF category are well established

Source: MMS to May '92