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## Burger King: creating a Whopping presence

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1991, the Canadian fast food industry was in a period of declining sales and Burger King was being outspent by its major competitors. McDonald's was spending seven times as much on advertising as Burger King, Harvey's and Wendy's were both spending 25% more.

Rather than try to match the competition's multi-product advertising strategies, a counter strategy was developed for English Canada that focused on Burger King's flagship product, the Whopper.

The campaign had several key components. Individual promotional programmes were developed for the franchisees and a much closer relationship between the company and its local and regional stores was put into place.

Another critical component was the media strategy. Rather than being heavily outspent on television, Burger King decided to concentrate its spending on outdoor advertising, giving it a medium that it could dominate. Using outdoor posters, external bus boards and transit shelters, backed by strong promotional advertising in local newspapers and radio, Burger King found a way to make its smaller share of voice noticed and heard.

When you are spending less than the competition and using billboards as the main media, you need bold, dramatic, memorable advertising that clearly differentiates you from everyone else.

This case study demonstrates the value of having a focused, national strategy that localizes promotional support with an ownable medium and then ties them together with an outstanding, original creative campaign.

The results surpassed all forecasts. The combination of local, in-store marketing and a highly focused, dramatic advertising campaign resulted in whopping annual sales increases (up 15% in one year) in 1992, 1993 and 1994.

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### SITUATION ANALYSIS

Despite significant socio-economic changes since 1960, the consumer benefits associated with fast food stores remain essentially the same: good food, speed, convenience and value, with people's perception of food quality the biggest single factor in choice. Speed, convenience and value are seldom major discriminators, although convenience, as with gas stations, is often a motivation in its own right.

The fast food industry in English-speaking Canada has broad appeal across all ages and socio-economic groups. Historically, McDonald's was perceived by more people in more age groups as offering the best in food quality and value, a long way ahead of its competitors.

Canadians have become more conditioned to McDonald's through extensive advertising in this country plus extensive spillover from the United States. As a result, Burger King was not only outspent by a factor of seven in Canada, but, with the US spillover, this figure was more like a factor of ten. On top of this, McDonald's had more than 50% market share and nearly four times more outlets than Burger King.

Rather than try to be more things to more people, with its ever expanding range of chicken, fish and pizza products, Burger King decided to focus exclusively on what it did best, making a great tasting hamburger.

## **STRATEGY AND EXECUTION**

Focus group research reinforced what the client and agency already believed, that people who had tried the Whopper felt it was a better tasting burger than those served by McDonald's, Harvey's and Wendy's. The reasons? It was very satisfying, very substantial, had consistently good fresh vegetable ingredients, and offered great value for the money. Since Burger King could not match the broad, multi-product advertising strategies of its competitors, a counter strategy was proposed. It was decided to focus exclusively on Burger King's flagship product, the Whopper.

With a budget under \$10 million, compared with McDonald's \$70 million and the \$12 million budgets of Harvey's and Wendy's, Burger King had to find a way to break through the fast food advertising clutter.

A media strategy using billboards for the brand advertising and, radio and local newspapers for individual franchise promotions, enabled Burger King to have a larger share of voice (SOV) in these two alternative media.

The creative strategy called for a unique way to bring attention to the Burger King Whopper. Creative research showed that no matter how well a burger is photographed, one burger looked very much like another on a billboard. This resulted in the creative solution of dramatizing the fresh ingredients that go into a Whopper, particularly the tomatoes, the lettuce and the onions.

Instead of showing a Whopper, we showed a whopping big tomato with the line: 'The big taste of a Whopper.' In another billboard we showed a whopping big lettuce using the line: 'Lettuce have a Whopper.' We also added a new perspective to the theme, 'home of the Whopper,' by showing a whopping big burger in a row of townhouses. These were just three of the billboards that ran in the first two years and were displayed extensively in Burger King restaurants during the period. A total of 3,000 poster sites were used each year across Canada, including transit shelters and external bus boards.

In the third year, we gave new life to the campaign by using visual icons that built on the international reputation of Burger King. A picture of a whopping big tomato beside the Leaning Tower of Pisa had the line: 'I'm leaning towards a Whopper.' And the picture of St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square with its whopping big onion domes, had the line: 'I'm Russian for a Whopper.' We also added a pride-building billboard using the theme: 'The King. Burger King.' This, too, was displayed in Burger King restaurants.

## **RESULTS**

The combination of a highly focused billboard campaign and targeted local advertising on radio and in the local newspapers resulted in sales increases in each of the campaign's three years:

- Sales increased 5.7% in 1994 over 1993.
- Sales increased 13% in 1993 over 1992.
- Sales increased 15.3% in 1992 over 1991.

That represents a cumulative 37.7% increase over three years. These results are based on weekly sales reports from every Burger King restaurant in Canada. All sales increases are based on comparable results with the previous year and do not include the impact of a handful of new Burger King restaurant openings that took place during the period. Local promotions played an important role in supplementing the main Burger King billboard campaign.

## **REGINA**

In 1992, a promotion was developed in Regina around the Saskatchewan Roughriders football team. A specific game was designated against Calgary, its key division rival, for the promotion. If Regina won the game, every

spectator could go to the local Burger King store in the area, show their stadium ticket and receive a free Whopper. This was promoted on local radio and at the football stadium. Game attendance increased. So did the turn out at Burger King. And lineups after the designated winning game went around the block. In fact, sales in Regina were up 30% during the football season. The promotion was repeated with similar results in 1993 and 1994. The Roughriders won every designated game during the period, possibly because the players had one simple goal: 'Win a Whopper for the fans.'

## TORONTO

Throughout 1993, the agency negotiated the use and sponsorship of the FM radio station's Mix 99.9 cruiser, to be used by Burger King in conjunction with their radio advertising on that station. The cruiser was present at many special events, concerts, the Canadian National Exhibition and Ontario Place. This provided Burger King with a great opportunity for sampling and coupon distribution to people of all types and ages. The extra on-air value of the promotion was estimated by the station to be worth \$400,000.

In 1994, as part of their regular radio buy, the agency suggested a January traffic-building promotion for the greater metropolitan Toronto area in conjunction with CHUM-FM. The prize? Two tickets to the 1994 winter Olympics at Lillehammer, Norway. To enter, people could either phone CHUM-FM or take their ballot into any Burger King restaurant. Despite the record cold weather that winter, there were over 50,000 entry ballots and, even though sales for Burger King were marginally down in other markets, January sales for Burger King in the Toronto area were up over the year before.

## CONCLUSION

The special attention giving Burger King stores additional support at the local level, did a lot to build franchisee enthusiasm and increase sales. But it was memorable advertising that clearly differentiated Burger King and its Whopper from everyone else, despite a lower budget that restricted it to outdoor as its primary medium.

This case study demonstrates the value of having a creatively focused, national strategy in an ownable medium. When combined with regional promotions and local store marketing, Burger King posted a whopping sales increase of more than 37% between 1992 and 1994.

### CLIENT

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### AGENCY

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