

Cassies 2005 Cases

Brand: K & G Fashion Stores

Winner: Off To A Good Start—Certificate of Excellence

Client Credits: K & G Fashion Stores (The Men's Wearhouse)

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Crossover Notes: All winning cases contain lessons that cross over from one case to another. The notes for this case are as follows, and are attached. The full set can be downloaded from the Case Library section at www.cassies.ca

- Crossover Note 1.** What a Brand Stands For
- Crossover Note 3.** Core Equity versus Price & Promotion
- Crossover Note 11.** The Eureka Insight.
- Crossover Note 19.** Great minds think alike.
- Crossover Note 20.** Emotional versus Rational.
- Crossover Note 25.** Brand Linkage (when should the brand name appear).

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Results Period (Continuous Months): October 2004 – May 2005.

Start of Advertising/Communication Effort: October 4, 2004.

Base Period: 12 month rolling trends, June 2004 – September 2004.

Discount clothing stores usually follow the adage, “pile ‘em high and watch ‘em fly.” Promise quantity at low prices and people will flock to your doors. K&G Fashion Superstores is a US\$2B discount fashion retailer, owned by The Mens Wearhouse of San Francisco. They certainly believed in this. **Crossover Note 1.** Until October of 2004, that is.

K&G operates 77 stores in over 50 markets across the U.S. They sell name and designer brands at deep discounts mainly in industrial warehouse stores. Over the years, value messages, limited and inconsistent branding, out-of-the-way store locations, and heavy competition from the likes of Marshall’s, TJ Maxx, Kohls and outlet malls, were taking their toll on business. An increasingly savvy consumer, trained by exposure to designer discount stores, wants style and individuality – at a price that makes them feel smart. K&G was sorely out of step. **Crossover Note 3.**

This case explores how a powerful insight, a consistent simple message, and distinctive advertising jump-started K&G’s annual sales growth from a paltry 1% in the previous year to over 30%. This outstrips market growth of 7% for the same period.

And, as the paper also shows, there were no marketing, merchandising or operational changes to explain this, other than the introduction of the television campaign, “Look like a million bucks, for a whole lot less” in October 2004.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

K&G Fashion Superstores was founded in Atlanta in 1989 primarily as a men’s suit discount retailer. In 1999, The Mens Wearhouse of Fremont, California bought K&G with plans to expand across the southern and midwestern United States. The discount clothing industry was rapidly fragmenting with competitors like Marshall’s, TJ Maxx and Kohl’s being joined by designer discount stores, outlet malls and off-price discounters. The Mens Wearhouse saw this as a growth opportunity, and a way to clear merchandise from its national chain of stores (also called The Mens Wearhouse).

From 1999-2004, K&G used in-house newspaper advertising, with the occasional help of a New York ad agency. They profiled merchandise for men and women in national half-page newspaper ads – with surprisingly low price points. What the ads lacked in personality and style, they made up for in information.

But the market was changing. Shoppers were increasingly coming to believe that style and fashion did not need a high price tag. Target, with Phillippe Stark designs, Saks Fifth Avenue with “Off Fifth,” and Neiman Marcus with “Last Call” (not to mention the juggernaut Wal-Mart) were all training shoppers to insist that retailers provide style at affordable prices.

Could a store, with 15 years of sales flyers, and 20,000 square foot warehouse stores in out-of-the-way locations, become a destination for fashionistas? With a fraction of Marshall's or TJ Maxx's media spend, could K&G get noticed?

We considered (and even tried) to differentiate K&G by using newspapers only. But newspaper lacked the impact needed to make K&G fashionable and unavoidable.

Television seemed out of the question, because of high production costs (especially for fashion brands). Then we hit on an idea that was so simple we were able to produce the required spots for the year at a cost comparable to producing bi-weekly newspaper ads.

STRATEGY & INSIGHT

We needed a “brand idea” to support the range of merchandise that K&G had in-stock at any given time. Through the agency's proprietary Consumer Segmentation Model, we determined that not all fashion shopaholics are alike. There's a distinctive group of people who love the impulsive thrill of style. These deal-seekers want to look and feel stylish first, then brag about how little they paid second. This yin-yang lets them feel stylish and intelligent – not superficial. [Crossover Note 11](#).

Creative had to give K&G style, while not compromising the discount heritage. It had to touch an emotional chord that newspaper hadn't. [Crossover Note 20](#). It had to prove that shoppers could *look like a million bucks, for a whole lot less*. [Crossover Note 19](#).

We would demonstrate how fantastic shoppers look in great styles from K&G – creating an image of style and fashionability. Then, with a clever twist, we would show that these people are very cost-minded. We would give the brand a distinctive personality that was witty, and intelligent – resonating with our target shopper. We then redeployed 90% of the dollars (with no increase in budget) from newspaper to television. A combination of spot and cable enabled us to focus on the geographies closest to the retail outlets.

EXECUTION

Television showed men and women in clothes and situations that look expensive, and then showed how inexpensive the outfit really was. The spots were kept simple and entertaining, allowing us to shoot 12-15 spots a year while still delivering style. We also developed branding that related the advertising to in-store experience—using the brand's colour scheme and a shopping bag as a mnemonic device. To be cost effective, we created a modular approach for each 30 second spot. The upfront captured the storyline with our ‘models’ in K&G Fashion. The back-end featured a range of K&G merchandise and could be updated throughout the year or customized by market. [Crossover Note 25](#).

“Lean” 0:20

Open on a man leaning up against a very expensive car. He is wearing a nice Italian Suit. The car then drives away, leaving the man standing there. A super appears on screen.
 V/O: *K&G. For men for women for less.*

“Cheque” 0:20

Open on a couple in a fancy looking restaurant. They're both dressed in elegant clothes. As we watch, the waiter walks by and places the bill in front of the man. The man then pushes the bill across the table to the woman. A super appears on screen.

V/O: *K&G. For men for women for less.*

“Quarter” 0:20

Open on a well-dressed woman walking purposefully along the street with her dog. She looks confident in her matching skirt and blouse. She pauses for a second, and peers at something on the pavement. We see her pick up a quarter. A super appears on screen.
 V/O: *K&G. For men for women for less.*

Since there would still be the need for tactical print (for store events in limited markets, for example), we developed an equally simple print format and applied a shopping bag mnemonic device there too. We also extended the executional elements of the campaign into the store by applying colour and branding mnemonics, where appropriate, in POS.

The result was a unified television, print and in-store presence, for the first time since the store opened.

BUSINESS RESULTS

As retailers first and foremost, K&G's management care about one thing only: same-store sales trends. In fact, The Mens Wearhouse does no brand health tracking other than detailed sales analysis. And on this measure, the "Look Like a Million Bucks" campaign has had unparalleled success, winning accolades from both the company's founder/CEO and its President. K&G has seen double-digit sales growth nearly every month since the inception of the campaign (and this has continued past the period covered in this paper).

Average monthly sales per store, a measure that eliminates the influence of new store openings, was up 34.6%, the highest growth K&G has ever seen.

Pre TV Launch (June '04-Sept '04)	Post TV Launch (Oct '04-May '05)	Percent Change
US\$310,960	US\$418,586	+34.6%

And growth is directly attributed to traffic, not price increases. Net transactions per store grew by 31% during the October '04 to May '05 television launch period.

Pre TV Launch (June '04-Sept '04)	Post TV Launch (Oct '04-May '05)	Percent Change
4,465	5,847	+30.9%

The sales results have encouraged George Zimmer, founder and CEO of K&G's parent company, to predict that K&G could be a billion dollar company by 2010.

CAUSE & EFFECT BETWEEN ADVERTISING AND RESULTS

"The only thing we changed is our advertising. It is the single biggest factor in our success today." *Charlie Bresler, President, The Mens Wearhouse*

Quite simply, there were no changes to merchandising, display, promotion or pricing. It is the perfect controlled experiment – only one variable to consider.

Looking at US Census Data, market growth was 7%. So K&G far outpaced the market growth – it was not merely riding a bubble.

Replacing a price-oriented newspaper campaign with "Look Like a Million Bucks" on television, with the same level of investment, has driven K&G's sales far beyond anyone's wildest dreams.

End of Case. Crossover Notes follow.

INTRODUCTION TO CROSSOVER NOTES — CASSIES 2005

[For K&G Stores]

Crossover Notes have been going for several years, and now run to 28 pages.

We used to attach a full set to all cases, but to save a few trees, we now include only the Notes particular to any case.

The idea of Crossover Notes occurred to me while I was editing Cassies 1997.

I was a consultant by then. Before that I had reached the category manager level at P&G (what they quaintly called the Associate Advertising Manager). I had then clambered up the ladder at O&M, eventually becoming President and later Vice Chairman—both in Toronto. P&G and O&M were both passionate about “lessons learned,” and so was I. In those days (it seems hard to believe now) we felt rushed off our feet. But we did have time to study if campaigns were working or not, and come to conclusions about why.

There are lessons, like gold dust, in all the Cassies cases. So in 1997 I decided to extract them. This started with bite-sized footnotes about lessons that “cross over” from one case to another. And the idea kept growing. It is still anchored to winning cases, but I also draw on other thinking for more complex issues.

You can use Crossover Notes in two ways. Although they didn’t start out as a crash course in advertising, they are worth reading as a whole. You can also dip into them selectively. The headings on the next page will help you choose.

I’ve tried to be even-handed on controversial issues, but here and there you will sense my point of view. For this I thank the Cassies for not editing their Editor.

We now have over 150 published cases. They’re a growing body of experience. I hope I’ve helped pass some of the learning on.

David Rutherford

Toronto: December 2005.

For advice on brand-building see *Excellence in Brand Communication*—authored by leading Canadians from across the marketing and advertising spectrum.

It is published by the ICA. See www.ica.adbeast.com.

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The Notes for this case are marked ✓ and come next.

K&G STORES. CROSSOVER NOTES. CASSIES 2005.

1. **What a Brand Stands For.** People in real life hardly give the deeper meaning of brands a second thought. They know that some appeal more than others. They may have a sense that brands jostle for their attention. But that's about it. They certainly don't agonize over what is the essence of this, or the abiding truth of that.

But branding goes deeper than we in marketing may realize. Before marketing was even thought of, branding was part of life. Everything from national flags, to coinage, to the uniforms on soldiers, boy scouts and Supreme Court judges, to the plumage on peacocks (human and otherwise), is a form of branding. Business had an early example in the 1800s when Harley Procter of P&G heard a pastor quote a biblical text about ivory palaces. Goodbye Procter & Gamble White Soap. Hello Ivory. More recently, Tom Peters published *A Brand Called You*. And Tony Blair tried to re-brand the UK as "Cool Britannia."

A brand, in the fullest sense, is hard to define. Dictionary definitions tend to focus on the trademark aspect, and yes, branding does involve some sort of identifying mark. But this misses the point. What makes a brand valuable?

The answer is The Advantage of Belief.¹ Charles Revson of Revlon famously said, "In the factory we make cosmetics. In the store we sell hope." In other words, a brand is not a product; it's what people believe about a product. These beliefs can be immensely powerful. The most astonishing is the placebo effect. In clinical trials, many patients respond to the "sugar pill," even when they have serious diseases. We see the same thing with blind and identified product tests. With a strong brand, the preference jumps. (See *What's in a Name* by John Philip Jones.) And when the Advantage of Belief takes hold, it leads to a long list of benefits:

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| a) Customer loyalty | e) Facilitating brand extensions |
| b) Higher price | f) Withstanding competitive attack |
| c) Higher cash flows | g) Motivating staff and attracting new talent |
| d) Higher long-term profitability | h) Potentially augmenting the stock price |

This doesn't, of course, answer the question, "how do you build these beliefs?" There are widely varying notions, but most agree on the basic principles: (1) stake out what the brand can and should stand for (2) stick with this over time (3) evolve to account for lessons learned and market changes.²

This can't be done by empty promises. We have to assess what consumers want against what the product delivers—and tell the story better than competitors do. We have a melting pot of perceptions and reality to work with. All the "brand" ideas are there to help—Brand Image, Equity, Personality, Character, Essence, Relationship, Footprint, Truth, Soul, Identity, and so on—along with old faithfuls like Positioning, Focus of Sale, USP, Features, Attributes, Benefits and Values. Whatever the terminology, though, "what the brand stands for" is critical.

¹ This is a phrase of mine, though the idea that a brand is "more" has been described by many authors.

² How do you do this, and evolve? See *Excellence in Brand Communication*: www.ica.adbeast.com

- 3. Core Equity versus Price & Promotion.** From a financial point of view, a brand is not an abstract notion. It has to make good money as long as you hold onto it, and it has to be valuable if you want to sell it. A brand under price and promotion pressure has to make tough decisions. If you don't fight fire with fire, you lose business in the short term. But if you don't invest in brand-building, you're likely to lose much more over the long term.

This is the choice between a "clear and present danger" and a "worse but less immediate one." It's hard to get it right, but we probably succumb more than we should to short-term pressures. Fido in Cassies 99; Clearnet and KD in Cassies 2001; Nautilus and Sidekicks in Cassies 2002; Molson's Bubba, Dodge SX 2.0, Manitoba Telecom, MINI, Sola Nero and Toyota Matrix in Cassies 2003; Cottonelle, Réno Dépôt and Toyota Sienna in Cassies 2004; All Bran, K&G Stores, Energizer Lithium, Hubba Bubba, Moores, Stouffer's Bistro and Familiprix in Cassies 2005 all faced this issue. All emphasized brand value, rather than price and promotion.

Core Equity has more than one meaning. One comes from the "bundle of meanings" in the audience's mind. Another is the equity in financial terms. This is a developing area, and for more information contact the ICA about the publication *Measuring And Valuing Brand Equity*.

11. The Eureka Insight. These feature in many cases. Some examples:

- Oh Henry! None of the gut-fillers had tried to own hunger, even though it was the high ground for the category. Cassies II. See also *Crossover Note 7*.
- Buckley's. Rather than side-step their bad taste, Buckley's relished it. Cassies III.
- Chrysler. Minivans were "my most expensive household appliance." Even so, *emotion* was the key to an immensely successful launch. Cassies III.
- Philadelphia Cream Cheese. In research, people often do not own up to what they really want, which in this case was "permission to indulge." Cassies III.
- Richmond Savings. Almost everyone hated banks, but it still took insight to turn this into the "Humungous Bank." Cassies III.
- Eggs are natural, but in word-association tests, consumers did not say so. (See *12. Changing the Goalposts*.) The farmer campaign brought "natural" to life.
- Sunlight. Getting dirty is fun. This is diametrically opposed to the conventional wisdom, dominated by Tide, that clean is good and dirt is bad. Cassies 99.
- Fido in Cassies 99. In an echo of Apple vs. IBM, Fido saw that consumers needed the human touch. See also Clearnet and "the future is friendly" in Cassies 2001.
- Diet Pepsi in Cassies 2002. They found a way to be youthful without being too young in the "forever young" campaign.
- Listerine in Cassies 2002: healthy gums, after a century talking about bad breath.
- Pro•Line in Cassies 2002: Appealed to non-experts with "Anyone can win."
- Aero. Saw the power of "melting" in Cassies 2003.
- Crown Diamond. Used the fact that men hate to paint in Cassies 2003.
- Super 7. Ignored the political correctness of being tasteful. Cassies 2003.
- Cottonelle. Talked to women as women, not as "family." Cassies 2004.
- Quebec Milk. Saw the blindingly obvious. That just asking people to drink more milk might cause it. Cassies 2004.

- Toyota Sienna. Realized that the answer lay in what SUV buyers do. Cassies 2004.
- Irving's Cruisin' to Win. Saw the power of *small* prizes. Cassies 2005.
- Crescendo. Like Oh Henry! saw unoccupied high ground. Cassies 2005.
- Butter. Saw a way to use "natural" to connote taste and health. Cassies 2005.
- Anti-Smoking. Saw the power of "Stupid." Cassies 2005.
- Jergens Ultra Care. Saw a way to reposition skin. Cassies 2005.
- Whiskas saw things from the *cat's* point of view. Cassies 2005.
- Moores used the fact that their target audience hates shopping. Cassies 2005.
- Harvey's realized the significance of The Grill.
- Quebec Lotto 6/49. If 6/49 winners are so generous, be nice to them.
- United Way saw power in the Hand icon.
- Leucan realized that there is still hope, despite childhood cancer.
- CIBC Run for the Cure saw the power in the Pinnie idea.
- Juicy Fruit saw how to build a new image by (almost literally) destroying the old one.
- Quebec Milk saw power in the obvious—if one glass is good, two are better.
- Plus virtually all the cases in *Crossover Note 10*.

19. Great minds think alike. Strong brands always differentiate themselves. That said, the underlying thinking does not necessarily have to be totally unique. In Cassies 2002, Diet Pepsi, Five Alive and toronto.com all came to similar conclusions about the young men i.e. they are media savvy, cynical about marketing, feel responsibility looming, and don't want to give up on the best and craziest parts of being young. Fido and Clearnet in earlier Cassies both identified a confused and intimidated public. The car cases in Cassies 2003 (Dodge SX 2.0, MINI, and Toyota Matrix) all had similar conclusions about the joy of driving. Butter in Cassies 2005 and Eggs in Cassies 99 uncovered similar ideas about "natural." Designer Depot and K&G stores in Cassies 2005 came to similar conclusions about the quality/price shopper. Twix, looking at 20-somethings, found attitudes similar to what Diet Pepsi and Five Alive had found. See also *7. Fighting for the Same High Ground*.

20. Emotional versus Rational. There's a great quote that "a brand is a bundle of meanings." Many of these meanings are rooted in emotion rather than reason, so if we showed a Vulcan a typical Creative Strategy (especially one from the packaged goods companies in their heyday) he would be puzzled. The key consumer benefit is always rational, and the rationale is, well, rational too. Our Vulcan would say that it is not logical to be so logical, because Earthlings are, well, not logical.

It's worth asking why Creative Strategies are this way. First, there's the tendency to assess issues analytically rather than intuitively. This was fertile ground for the ideas of Claude Hopkins, writing *Scientific Advertising* in 1922, and Rosser Reeves, writing *Reality in Advertising* in 1960. The resulting hard-sell advertising appealed to the mentality of many North American advertisers. Hard sell then had enough successes to make the beliefs self-fulfilling. Selective perception expunged the failures.

Others, led by Bill Bernbach, argued for a more intuitive approach, and recently the "emotion" approach has shone more brightly on the radar screen. But even today, there are Creative Strategies that just tuck the emotional benefits in under Brand Character, or don't mention them at all.

I used to make that mistake. When I was Brand Manager on Tide we said implacably that Tide stood for cleaning. At an unwritten level, we knew that Tide also stood for *trust*, but this emotional benefit did not appear in the Creative Strategy—and we could easily have overlooked it.

Make sure your mental model of advertising rings true to what people are really like. Often, we are too rational, which could be tragic. John Bartle of Bartle Bogle Hegarty (the UK agency famous for creativity that works) calls for us to think in terms of the

~Unique Emotional Proposition~

Agencies and clients factoring this in more than they used to, but it still doesn't get pride of place. Given what we are learning about Emotional Intelligence, this strikes me as illogical, and lord knows what a Vulcan would say. Here are winners that *could* have focused on the rational, but chose emotion:

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| Cassies III | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chrysler NS Minivan. It had functional improvements, but the campaign was heavily infused with emotional benefits. • Philadelphia Cream Cheese. The Angel campaign captured the emotional benefit of "permission to indulge," along with the rational benefit of 60% less fat than butter or margarine. |
| Cassies 99 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Richmond Savings. The Humungous Bank campaign. • AGF Funds. The "what are you doing after work" campaign charmed its way into people's pocketbooks. • becel. With hard-hitting print, and a strong doctors/nutritionist plan, it reached #1. They then wanted to get on TV, but regulators forbade hard-hitting claims. This led to the "young at heart" campaign, and spectacular long-term business growth. • Clearnet MiKe. It appealed to the self-image of its pragmatic, project-driven target audience. • Fido. It includes rational benefits, but the main pull is user-friendliness. • St-Hubert tapped into chez-nous. • Sunlight captured the joy of getting dirty. • Wonder Bread. They could have sold on taste + nutrition, but instead used the joy of childhood. |
| Cassies 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joe's Rant made us proud. • Clarica made it all look simple. • Clearnet gave us the future is friendly. • Kraft tugged at our heartstrings with KD moments. |
| Cassies 2002 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manitoba Telecom gave us Morty, the talking bison. • The Bank of Montreal and Scotiabank made us smile. • Campbell's gave us the less-than-perfect family. • CFL fanned the flames of rivalry. • Diet Pepsi and Five Alive gave us back our youth. • ED made us think. • Home Furnaces tickled the fancy of an older audience. • Nautilus gave us joie de vivre. • Philly showed us that a less-than-perfect angel was still working. • Pine-Sol took a quirky look at keeping the house clean. • Sidekicks gave the family a helper. • Sloche appealed to teen rebelliousness. • The SAAQ campaign scared us to death. |

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| Cassies 2003 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manitoba Telecom showed that Morty the bison was still working. • Toyota Matrix went for emotion rather than reason. • Sola Nero made wine youthful and hip. • Viagra was, well, Viagra. |
| Cassies 2004 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The United Way cast off its “administrative” image. • Cottonelle talked to women as women. • Gaz Metro dealt with the fear of Gas. • Prairie Milk appealed to teens’ need for growth. |
| Cassies 2005 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toyota Sienna positioned itself as the cool minivan. • Smoking is just “Stupid.” • Energizer Lithium found that the rational approach was not working. • Coricidin II had to find a way to get a blood pressure benefit across. • Activia had to do the same with the “digestive” benefit. • Run for the Cure, perhaps not surprisingly, found that emotion was appropriate. |

25. Brand Linkage (when should the brand name appear). How often do we hear, “I saw this great ad last night...but I can't remember what it was for.” This is a brand linkage problem, and it's two-edged. Highly engaging advertising can drown out the brand identity (we used to call it “video vampire”). But advertising that sells crudely runs the risk of being physically or mentally zapped.

When you assess advertising, your mental model will affect your attitude to brand linkage. But there are no simple answers. Some executions with seemingly bullet-proof linkage don't work. Some with seemingly minimal i.d. hook the brand into the consumer's mind. The challenge is to be relevant *and* different at the same time. Relevant, by the way, is *not* the same as familiar. Something can be relevant, but be expressed in a totally new way. If “familiar” is part of your mental model (knowingly or not) you run the risk of only approving advertising that has been seen before.

One of the (supposed) ways to ensure brand linkage is to say/show the brand name “early and often.” This idea seems to have taken hold in the 60s.³ A great many Cassies winners do *not* reflect this, e.g. Chrysler NS Minivan, Dove, Imperial Margarine, Molson Canadian, Budweiser, Claritin, Pontiac Sunfire, Richmond Savings, Metro Toronto Zoo, Goodwill, Sunlight, becel, St-Hubert, Clearnet, Clarica, Manitoba Telecom, Lipton Chicken Noodle, i-wireless, Pro●Line, Pine-Sol, Bank of Montreal, Scotiabank, Aero, Cottonelle, Prairie Milk, Réno Dépôt, Crescendo, Harvey's, K&G Stores, Energizer Lithium, Quebec Lotto 6/49, United Way, Moores, Familiprix.

Some very successful advertising puts the brand name front and centre, but it's possible in today's over-hyped world that “early and often” is a turn-off to consumers. Each situation has to be assessed on its merits. But an unthinking belief in “early and often” should come to an end.

End of K&G Crossover Notes.

³ This belief came out of Day-After-Recall testing. The technique has since been largely discredited, but debates continue about the role of recall, recognition, and the like. See *Crossover Note 13*.