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The Pepsi 'Meunier' Campaign

INTRODUCTION

Pepsi-Cola Canada's 'Meunier' campaign demonstrates how art and science converge to create advertising that works. The science of advertising is the qualitative and quantitative research that sheds light on the target market. The art comes from interpreting that data, often in new and unique ways, by asking the right questions and learning how to 'listen' carefully to discover the underlying needs and wants of the customer. It is from this blend of statistical science and interpretative analysis that the successful creative solutions flow. But they do so only when the client and the agency have the courage to take these insights into the psyche of the customer and use them as creative springboards to new levels of interpretation and execution. The Pepsi Meunier case is an example of this process.

The Quebec soft drink market in 1984 was telling Pepsi that something was wrong. The 'Choice of a New Generation' campaign while it worked well in the rest of Canada and the United States was not connecting with Quebecers. Why? Research revealed that from an advertising perspective, Quebec was more than a unique part of Canada. It was a distinct market segment, complete with its own consumer attitudes and buyer behaviour. Research also showed that the market would respond favourably to the product if Pepsi was prepared to go beyond a superficial adaptation of the company's existing North American advertising.

Young Quebecers in the 1980s were re-defining their aspirations and priorities. They were crowning their own celebrities and creating their own made-in-Quebec lifestyle. Research revealed an inner-confidence among Quebec target groups. Pepsi's creative strategy arose from this understanding. What was called for was not the superficial re-make of an existing (English/American) strategy, but rather the creation of an indigenous Quebec campaign that conveyed a sense of deep understanding and empathy that allowed every Quebec customer to warmly respond to the product. The 'Meunier' campaign achieved this creative objective. And Pepsi's remarkable sales increase and market share growth quickly followed.

At the very least, this is a case about handling market segmentation. Pepsi created a highly focused campaign to attract the attention and loyalty of a key part of the North American market. Pepsi's willingness to change its assumptions about the Quebec market was a crucial strategic decision that led to the campaign's longevity and sales success.

CASSIE JUDGES' COMMENTS:

The selection of Pepsi's Meunier Campaign for the CASSIE Best of Show award was a clear consensus choice in the final voting for a number of reasons.

First, the results themselves are spectacular, with Pepsi moving from a poor number two position and making little headway against number one (despite aggressive pricing, in-store promotion and other marketing activities) to a strong number one position in Quebec.

Second, during the period of the advertising, the number one brand aggressively defended its position. It spent heavily on advertising and price activity - more heavily than Pepsi, which nevertheless grew to brand leader despite this competitive activity. A great example of the power of advertising.

Third, the advertising helped Pepsi increase sales and share of market both in the short term and the long term.

Fourth, the creative message and media use were chosen well. The creative had to understand the very particular attitudes of Quebecers to the brand in this category and overcome some significant negatives. The advertising causes much favourable word of mouth, media coverage and positive user imagery.

As one Quebec judge put it, people are curious about new commercials in the campaign. The case is a great example of how well-targeted advertising that is enjoyable and entertaining can win peoples' attention, hearts and loyalty.

All in all, the Pepsi Meunier campaign in Quebec is a great example of advertising, art and science at its best. Entertaining, informative, provocative and highly successful against one of the world 's strongest brands and most competitive companies.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the early 1970s, Pepsi Brand was outsold four-to-one by Coca-Cola across Canada. By 1980, it had achieved parity with Coca-Cola Classic in English Canada food stores, a position driven by the Pepsi 'Challenge'. This was later reinforced by the 'New Generation' copy. However, in Quebec, the New Generation campaign failed to make an impression on the consumer and the brand had stalled at 87 per cent of Coca-Cola's share by 1984.

STRATEGY

In 1985, J. Walter Thompson in Quebec developed an indigenous French advertising campaign based on the uniqueness of Québécois culture and humour. In so doing, Pepsi Cola became one of the first major multi-national marketers in Quebec to sustain this kind of commitment to a completely indigenous 'Quebec only' advertising campaign.

EXECUTION

An emerging young comedian, Claude Meunier, was featured to portray caricatures of classic Québécois characters who have an undying love of Pepsi. The campaign is now in its seventh year and has evolved over 30 television and an equal number of radio executions.

THE RESULTS

Today, Pepsi Brand is the number one soft drink in Quebec by a 20 per cent margin. The Meunier campaign has been directly credited with this success.

No other marketing initiatives were used that might explain this remarkable turn-around. The Meunier campaign is the only variable that can account for the sales and market share increases during this period.

In fact, during the period discussed, Coca-Cola had tried six different campaigns and maintained a two-to-one media spending supremacy to no avail. Pepsi's share of market has grown since 1985 and continues to do so.

BACKGROUND

Until the advent of 'The Pepsi Generation,' Pepsi had been a poor second choice to Coca-Cola around the world, with few exceptions. The campaign 'Come alive, you're in the Pepsi Generation' was launched in 1963 on a global basis. It capitalized on the growing teenage heavy-user group by portraying them as active, lively, free-thinking people with a zest for life. At the time it was considered a bold marketing synchronization with the emerging youth revolution sweeping the globe. Moreover, it was a recognition that this 'baby-boom' generation was emerging as a key consumer group.

In Canada, 'The Pepsi Generation' was followed in 1975 by the 'Pepsi Challenge' campaign which successfully alerted the consumer to the taste differential between Pepsi and Coke. It shifted the advertising message away from lifestyle to a clear product difference and by so doing drove Brand Pepsi to share parity with Coke in English food stores.

By 1985, it was felt that with this shift accomplished, it was time to resume a more typical soft drink campaign that harkened back to the visual and musical persuasiveness of previous Pepsi Generation campaigns.

Pepsi entered this fray with competitive credibility. To firmly establish Pepsi as the contemporary cola choice, The Choice of a New Generation campaign was launched in North America in 1984 with much fanfare and with the help of Michael Jackson. During the campaign, celebrity endorsements would come from Lionel Richie, Tina Turner, Rod Stewart, David Bowie, Robert Palmer, and Madonna.

QUEBEC MARKET

Within this competitive marketplace, Quebec holds a significant slice of the soft drink market in Canada, representing between 25 and 30 percent of total volume.

It is important to note that until the advent of the Pepsi Meunier campaign, the most likely creative approach among multinational advertisers was to adapt English strategies and copy into French.

Pepsi in Quebec had managed to make significant gains on Coca-Cola until the advent of the 'Choice of a New Generation' campaign. The 'Pepsi Challenge' which ran from 1975 to 1984 had successfully convinced consumers that Pepsi was the best tasting product, now the challenge was to convince the target that it was their brand and to go for greater market share.

While the 'Choice of a New Generation' was succeeding in convincing English consumers, it was failing to convince Quebec consumers because, quite simply, they were a different 'generation' than portrayed in the commercials.

The Quebec consumer generally rejected the use of Anglo-American icons such as Michael Jackson and as a result, the New Generation campaign was failing to stimulate additional growth. At that point, the obvious solution would have been to enlist the support of Quebec rock stars, of which there were many. Such a campaign - in effect, a regional adaptation of the English strategy - might have worked. But qualitative research was revealing an alternative strategy.

Since Quebec was culturally unique, it had developed its own entertainment system complete with its own stars. And within this system there was an emerging trend - comedy. In particular, it was a style of comedy that used typical Quebecois stereotypes to re-define the emerging new 'street-smart' culture of young, urban Quebecers.

This alternative comedy was definitely part of the 'new generation' within Quebec. It offered Pepsi a riskier but potentially more intimate link with its target market in Quebec.

The challenge that faced the creative team was to tie Pepsi more closely to the Quebec culture, make it relevant and ultimately make it an indigenous Quebec brand.

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

It was less that JWT and Pepsi had discovered something unique about the Quebec market, but more that they were prepared to do something radical and bold with this knowledge. For instance, pre-launch focus group testing revealed that the self-deprecating, ironic humour with which young Quebec comedians were viewing themselves and their culture was shared by many of their contemporaries. This suggested that a creative opportunity existed that had yet to be fully exploited in advertising.

There was concern that humour - especially the use of Quebec cultural clichés would be misconstrued and considered offensive. But subsequent testing of the ads proved this fear unfounded and, indeed, revealed how accurate the creative assumptions were.

STRATEGY AND EXECUTION

Research was an essential part of the success. In so many words, the focus group research at this stage revealed a common sentiment: 'Recognize that we are distinct, that we can laugh at ourselves and we will buy your product today and, just as importantly, we will give you our loyalty in the future.' The decision to use humour and a local comedian arose from this insight.

At the time there was a resurgence of comedy clubs in Quebec as new generations of Quebecers were becoming more secure in who they were. Along with this came an ability to laugh at themselves as long as the humour was not perceived as a put down. Pepsi was in a peculiar position in this regard because locally, the phrase 'un Pepsi' was a derogatory expression for a Quebec bumpkin. From a creative standpoint, the campaign was going to tread a very fine line between solidarity and alienation with its target market.

Our choice of spokesperson was Claude Meunier. At the time he was an emerging star on the comedy club circuit and had become a local celebrity in and around Montreal through his comedy duo of 'Ding et Dong.' He was far from universally known within the Quebec market but his cachet with urban youth in both Montreal and Quebec was becoming evident at the time.

Claude's act focused on Quebecois colloquialisms and characters - the Montreal rocker, the suave cosmopolitan and the aspiring hockey player. The basic premise of Claude's humour was that the things he said weren't really funny, but he thought they were and that's what made him funny.

The creative idea was to have each one of Claude's stable of Pepsi characters share one thing in common - an undying love of Pepsi. This became the creative theme that unified all the commercials. They'd climb mountains to get it, they'd worship it, they'd treat it like champagne.

The copy idea focused on love of the product. This gave us a way to link Meunier's characters with the tangible benefits of the product. This dual creative objective (awareness plus tangible product benefits) has been a key unifying theme for the 10-year duration of the campaign. The copy delivered on an entertainment level but with a continuing emphasis on rational product benefits. The core product credentials have never been absent from the campaign. This is in marked contrast to other beverage advertising (then and now) that offers one or the other but not both at the same time. At the time of launch, it differentiated the Meunier campaign from the Anglo/American bias of the Choice of a New Generation campaign.

It also differentiated Pepsi from its main brand competitor. Coca-Cola was using a mixture of indigenous French copy and U.S. adapts before and during the successful run of the Meunier campaign. They used Quebec personalities in everything from comedy to music to sports, but without the same level of success.

The difference between the two lies in the depth of understanding that Pepsi possessed and was prepared to act upon in the course of developing the campaign. Quebec symbols and icons were not merely layered on top of a pre-existing strategy. Instead the strategy arose from the bottom up, completely within the culture.

Notwithstanding Meunier's star impact and influence, what distinguished Pepsi from Coca-Cola was not just who was delivering the message, but also what he represented. To the audience, this was clearly a 'Quebec only' campaign, and not an adapted or transparent English hand-me-down creative strategy that had merely been translated into French.

In supporting the direction of the creative brief, qualitative data provided the creative team with specific insights into Quebecker's nuances. Ultimately, test creative was developed to the point of finished commercials which passed unaltered and aired as tested.

[Figure 1](#)

The approach to the creative has changed little since the inception of the campaign. The focus of every one of the Pepsi commercials is Pepsi product run through Meunier's unique off-the-wall filter. The actor has been cast in a multitude of roles including a local rock star, a hockey player, a taxi driver and a fisherman.

The campaign has evolved to the point where over time the executions have become simpler with fewer elements. As consumers have become familiar with Claude's characters, there is no need to establish who they are or their motivation for adoring the product. Continuity has played a key role in pushing the product message into that rare area where the distinction between commercial and entertainment becomes non-existent.

The copy continues to be researched on a regular basis both by industry publications and by JWT and Pepsi. PEAC communication tests, Clucas research, Info Presse data and quantitative monthly tracking studies continue to reinforce the initial assessments of the very first round of qualitative research. Moreover, this research has enabled the campaign to maintain its continuity. Pressure to change the creative approach merely for the sake of change has been resisted on the strength of positive consumer feedback.

MEDIA SELECTION

Television was selected as the primary medium and radio as a secondary tactical medium to conduct the campaign. Television allowed us to fully utilize Meunier's acting skills. Moreover, its broad reach and intimacy offered the most cost-effective way to quickly establish a relationship between the target audience and the product. Radio allowed the local bottler networks to address tactical needs whilst providing synergy with the TV campaign.

Media spending on TV was concentrated in the prime network time slots during the evening. Specific weekend programs such as the popular *Juste Pour Rire* comedy program and NHL Hockey were obvious buys during that period. The Pepsi bottlers often made local arrangements to augment the network campaign. In general, however, the media focus was primarily in major urban centers. Print, outdoor and in-store, featuring Meunier, have recently been added to the mediamix, providing one of the most powerful integrated plans in the market.

In the first year of the Meunier launch, studies showed that the effective reach of the campaign (those people in the target group who saw the ad(s) at least three times within a month) represented 92 percent of the target group.

THE RESULTS

We had been prepared to stay the course of developing a campaign specifically for the Quebec consumer which we were convinced would move them to Pepsi over a five-year period. The results were more immediate than anticipated and Pepsi quickly moved to parity and then superiority to the brand leader.

The campaign was launched in 1985 and immediately we saw movement in share where Pepsi had been 87% of Coke's share to the point where it was 96% of Coke's share. In Pepsi terms that is a Pepsi/Coke (P/C) ratio of 87 to a P/C ratio of 96.

[Figure 2](#)

In 1986, the brand moved to 118, a full four point market share lead over Coca-Cola.

Today, the P/C ratio stands at 175, 12 market share points better than Coca-Cola. The benefits of being the market leader are now showing themselves in a greater frequency of display, inventory and co-op versus the competition, a positioning that did not exist before the Meunier campaign.

The Meunier campaign has done more than just build the business. Quebeckers have embraced Pepsi as their brand. The commercials continually head the list of ads preferred by Quebec consumers according to the Dominance survey prepared by Info Presse Communications. Phrases from Pepsi commercials - such as, 'terrible, terrible, terrible'- have become part of the young Quebecois vocabulary. Despite its multinational roots, Pepsi is now embraced as an indigenous Quebec product.

[Figures 3 and 4](#)

ADVERTISING VARIABLES

Campaigns before Meunier enabled Pepsi to establish itself as a quality alternative to Coke, but had not given the brand a clear Quebec identity. The impact of the Choice of a New Generation campaign revealed a shift in consumer interest and a corresponding decline in sales and market share. The advent of the Meunier campaign identified and capitalized on this shift. It reversed a sales slide within its first year and has subsequently helped Pepsi gain market dominance over Coca-Cola.

All other variables of Pepsi's marketing for the product remained constant. During the course of this campaign, Coca-Cola undertook a series of creative changes and outspent Pepsi on a two-to-one basis in its media purchases. There is nothing we can identify other than the campaign itself that could explain the massive turnaround in consumer attitudes towards the product.

CONCLUSION

Consumer insight is the foundation of the success of this campaign. But it was insight that took some risks to articulate successfully. Had the Meunier characters been perceived as insulting buffoons, the campaign might have taken a dramatically different (and disastrous) turn. But prelaunch testing helped to overcome that fear, allowing the creative team to follow through. The campaign's resistance to competitive attack on all fronts, including Private Labels, and its ability to withstand significant competitive campaign shifts and a two-to-one spending disadvantage relative to Coca-Cola, further supports the strength of this case.

CLIENT

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NOTES & EXHIBITS

EXHIBIT 1: BUSINESS/CONSUMER FUNDAMENTALS

Ratio of Pepsi : Coke

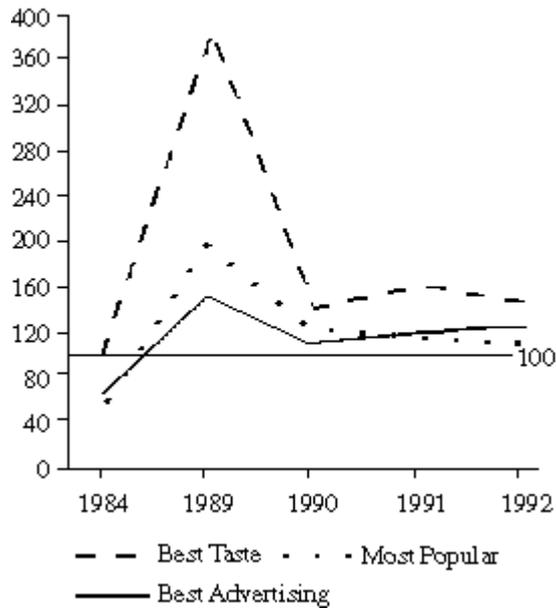


EXHIBIT 2: BUSINESS/CONSUMER FUNDAMENTALS

Ratio of Pepsi : Coke

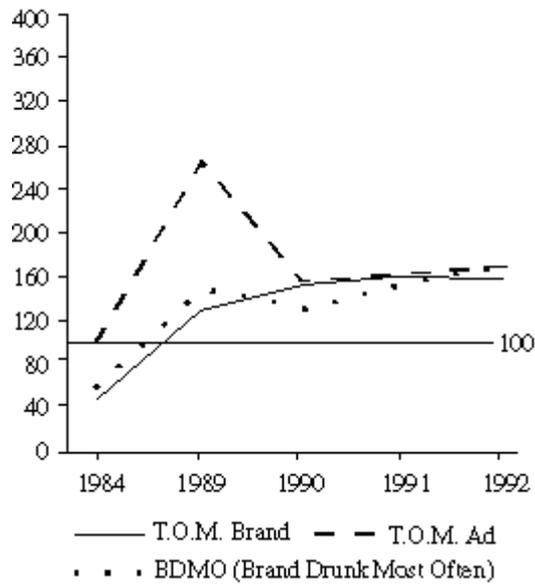
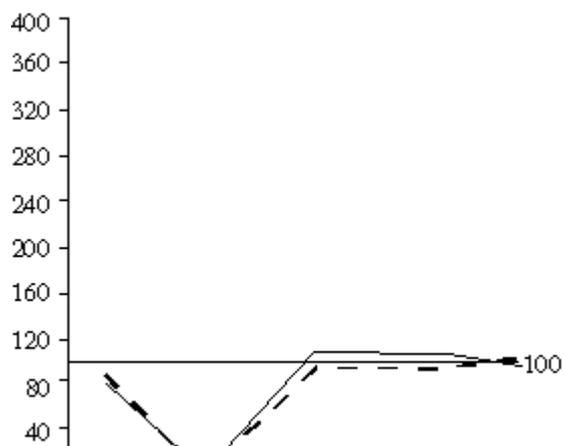


EXHIBIT 3: BUSINESS/CONSUMER FUNDAMENTALS

Ratio of Pepsi : Coke



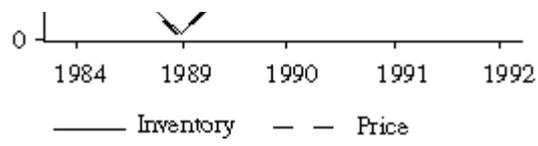


EXHIBIT 4: BUSINESS/CONSUMER FUNDAMENTALS

