

Agency: BBDO

Authors: W Mlacak and M Lawless

Polaroid Canada: 'Practical usage' campaign

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since it first introduced instant photography in 1948, Polaroid has been the only player in that segment of the market. However, the advent of high quality and affordable 35mm cameras and one-hour photo processing seriously eroded Polaroid's unique brand advantage and its share of the overall market.

New, fresh advertising would have to reposition the product now facing serious competition, albeit from beyond the instant segment. The driving idea of the campaign would still be to leverage Polaroid's brand advantage, but also to move the camera away from traditional 35mm camera uses and reposition the product using new benefits and advantages. The three 'reasons why' were developed, to promote the undeniable practical applications of instant photography: remembering, proving and describing something.

The creative executions, particularly for television, communicated these advantages in a fun and straightforward manner.

Shortly after the campaign launch, sales results started to reflect the effectiveness of the advertising. While industry sales figures as a whole were going down, Polaroid's were going up. Over the period 1991 to 1994, instant camera sales increased by 78% and film sales increased by 11%. In both cases the advertising drove the sales growth.

BACKGROUND

When Polaroid first introduced instant photography in 1948, it was a remarkable breakthrough in consumer photography. Polaroid prints were of comparable quality to other camera systems of the time, but the unique aspect of Polaroid pictures was that they developed instantly.

Instant photography became very popular with consumers and very profitable for Polaroid. However, in the 1980s, the advent of newer technology and a changing and more sophisticated consumer began to change the marketplace. New, compact, fully automatic 35mm cameras provided high quality prints never before achieved with easy-to-use cameras. Meanwhile, rapidly declining processing time to as low as one hour further contributed to the popularity of the 35mm camera. This development began to undermine Polaroid's key advantage: immediacy.

In the late 1980s, 35mm cameras and film became the standard in consumer photography for traditional photographic uses. The new 35mm prints forced comparisons with instant pictures and consumers perceived that there was some difference in terms of colour and resolution. In addition, an instant print was typically twice as expensive as a 35mm print.

As the photographic marketplace changed, Polaroid remained committed to the instant segment even though instant photography's competitive advantage of immediacy was slowly eroding.

With the advent of 35mm point-and-shoot cameras, there was a concern that consumers would be less likely to use Polaroid instant cameras in traditional photographic situations since they now had more camera options.

The key issue facing Polaroid in the late 1980s was how to make 'instant' important to consumers once again. Essentially, Polaroid had to begin to reposition the camera and rejuvenate what consumers saw as a mature brand.

STRATEGY AND EXECUTION

Polaroid needed to show consumers new ways to use instant photography to continue to build its business. Polaroid decided to expand its product positioning (currently fun, social situations) to include applications where immediacy was critical. These 'extended uses', as they were called, were practical applications like house hunting, renovation, repairs, decorating and documenting valuables. Polaroid aimed to increase usage among current owners (increase film sales), and to create a desire for instant photography among non-users (increase both camera and film sales) by giving them a new, practical reason to invest in a Polaroid camera.

ADVERTISING STRATEGY

The advertising would target a broad group of users and non-users of instant photography, between the ages of 25 and 65. Advertising was critical in changing consumers' perceptions of when to use a Polaroid camera. This was a major challenge since it meant changing how people think of photography and how they use cameras in general. Rather than just using photographs to capture people and events, photographs could be used to visually communicate in practical ways.

The unique brand advantage was that only Polaroid instant photography could provide photos instantly for immediate use in a wide range of practical applications. These applications could all be grouped into three areas representing the 'reasons why'. They would each support the unique brand advantage in a tangible way. These areas were:

- Remembering something immediately (house hunting, moving, renovating).
- Describing something immediately (repairs, shopping).
- Proving something immediately (documenting valuables, recording damage).

The advertising also played a role in addressing a competitive issue related to the higher cost of instant Polaroid film. By positioning instant pictures as an immediate solution to a problem, the price of film would likely become less of a concern to consumers.

EXECUTION

The 'practical usage' campaign ran from April 1991 to November 1994 utilizing radio, magazines and television. The campaign was developed based on examples of the three reasons why instant photography was valuable as a visual communicator.

RADIO

The 'practical usage' campaign was launched in April 1991 with three radio executions ('Gail', 'Cuckoo' and 'Jack-in-the-Box') in the top ten Polaroid markets. Each execution talked about the merits of using a Polaroid instant picture to communicate relative to other tools of remembering. The radio campaign was to provide local market support during the spring and the fall and winter of 1991 through to June 1992.

MAGAZINE

To supplement the radio support in local markets and provide national coverage, a magazine campaign was launched in June 1991 in national general interest and newsweekly magazines. The campaign ran until June 1992.

Three full page, four-colour executions were developed. Each ad featured a Polaroid picture superimposed on a black and white photo of a person to highlight the colour and quality of the Polaroid picture. Each execution focused on one of the reasons for using instant photography. 'Pipe' describes what the leaky pipe looks like;

'Plates' proves that the antique plate was in mint condition before it broke and, 'Fireplace' remembers what the fireplace looked like in the second house.

TELEVISION

In 1992, television was introduced to achieve greater reach of the target group and continue to build broad awareness of the practical usage message. Three executions were developed which played off the creative situations previously used in the magazine campaign. They ran from October 1992 to November 1994. 'Save your breath' became the leaky pipes adaptation; 'see it your way' became the antique plates adaptation and, 'why trust it to memory' became the fireplace adaptation.

THE RESULTS

The Canadian photography market has not grown significantly in the past few years. However, Polaroid's business in both film and cameras increased in the 1991 to 1994 period. During that time, instant camera unit sales at the end of 1994 increased 78% over 1990. Similarly, but not to as great a degree, film unit sales at the end of 1994 increased 12% during the same period (Table 1).

TABLE 1: SALES CHANGES (PERCENTAGE CHANGE OVER PREVIOUS YEAR)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1990-1994
Cameras	-23%	+17%	+7%	+24%	+15%	+78%
Film	+11%	+11%	-6%	+10%	-4%	+12%

During that period, there had been no significant changes in markets or distribution. Consumer promotion and in-store promotion did not increase dramatically from previous periods. In fact, this increase in unit sales occurred despite price increases in 1993 and 1994. These increased unit sales appeared to be occurring largely due to the effect of increased advertising and a consistent, relevant and unique advertising message.

[Figure 1](#) indicates Polaroid's success in a sluggish Canadian camera market. Prior to the campaign launch in April 1991, Polaroid camera unit sales were not as strong as they had been in previous years. Following the launch of the 'practical usage' advertising campaign, Polaroid's camera unit sales steadily grew from 1991 to 1994 with a significant increase in 1993 following the launch of the television advertising (see [Figure 1](#)).

Further proof of the 'practical usage' campaign's contribution is evident when advertising spending is tracked against unit sales. When Polaroid spent less on advertising in a given year, fewer cameras were shipped. When Polaroid spent more, unit sales increased. This has occurred despite a generally flat, and in some years, declining camera market. The Polaroid campaign won a number of Canadian, North American and international awards from 1991 to 1993:

- 1991 Toronto Art Directors Awards (Magazine Singles);
- 1991 London International (Magazine Campaign/Singles);
- 1992 Marketing Awards (Magazine Campaign/Singles - Gold/Bronze);
- 1992 New York Art Directors Awards (Magazine Single, TV Campaign Merit);
- 1993 Bessie Awards (TV Single/Campaign - Gold/Silver/Merit);
- 1993 International Advertising Festival of New York (TV Single/Campaign - Gold);
- 1993 Marketing Awards (TV Single, Campaign, Multi-Media).

CONCLUSION

The 'practical usage' strategy was the result of Polaroid's firm belief in the true value of instant photography and the desire to create consumer interest by showing them its unique benefit in a powerful, engaging and creative way. Polaroid had to rejuvenate its product. It had to show people new ways to use their old cameras and create a desire and need for instant photography among non-users. Polaroid had to communicate this in an intelligent, progressive and uniquely creative way to counter the image of Polaroid instant cameras as old technology. The

task was a difficult one since it meant changing people's perceptions of how to use photography in order to get consumers interested in the unique value of 'instant'.

The campaign's success can be attributed to a number of factors:

- A consistent and relevant advertising message.
- Use of a variety of media.
- Increased advertising spending to support media strategy.
- The integration of the advertising message throughout all areas of the company's marketing program including sales, promotion and in-store materials.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Polaroid.

CLIENT

Polaroid Canada

Will Mlacak

Marketing Manager

AGENCY

BBDO

Marianne Lawless

Sr. Account Manager



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NOTES & EXHIBITS

FIGURE 1: ANNUAL CHANGE IN CANADIAN CAMERA SALES, POLAROID UNITS SHIPPED AND POLAROID ADVERTISING SPENDING 1990-94

