

Canadian Advertising Success Stories 1999

Reactine

Agency: Taxi Advertising & Design
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INTRODUCTION

When the suffering is over, it's time for revenge.

This is the sentiment shared by millions of Canadian allergy sufferers who have joined the Reactine franchise since its launch in the over-the-counter (OTC) market in May 1995.

This is the case of an OTC victory for an antihistamine that moved from the doctor's office – where it had the number one share of antihistamine prescriptions – to the retail environment, where the consumer freely chooses from a plethora of brands promising relief.

Up against a giant like Claritin, and restricted by government regulations on broadcast advertising of OTC products, Reactine had to find a way to connect with consumers. The answer was not the clinical story of the doctor's office. It was a bond of empathy.

Consumers were fed up with feeling that allergies had the upper hand over them – and Reactine understood. It let sufferers exact revenge on their tormentors, and this took Reactine to a leadership position right out of the gate.¹

SITUATION ANALYSIS

One in four Canadians faces the annoyance and aggravation of allergies. For some, it's once a year. For others, it's all year long. Desperate to stop the suffering, they are in constant search of a remedy that works.

To find relief, they can turn to two sources: their doctor for a prescription, or their local drug store for a multitude of over-the-counter (OTC) medications.

Pfizer's Reactine was the antihistamine most prescribed by doctors. Then, in 1995, Pfizer had the opportunity to launch Reactine as an OTC product – moving from the controlled, prescription environment to the open access of retail and consumer choice. This was not without its challenges:

- The OTC market had an overwhelming array of choices on the shelf.
- The category was very aggressive. Competitors, particularly Claritin, spend heavily on ads and promotions.
- It was difficult to marshal television creative through layers of limitations and restrictions at HPB (the government clearance body for OTC products at the time).

To this last point, Reactine – as an active metabolite – represented a new class of antihistamines, a point

of difference offering several consumer benefits. However, we could not use this in broadcast launch advertising because of government restrictions. So, we could not fight with a rational product story; we had to win by connecting with consumers on an emotional level.

STRATEGY AND EXECUTION

With so many competitors, how could Reactine stand out?

The first step was to get into the stuffed, plugged heads of consumers, and understand more than the symptoms themselves.

People with allergies suffer for an average of fifteen years or more. It's an aggravation that can develop during childhood, catch up with you in your twenties, or grow in prominence in your mid thirties through forties. Sufferers have often tried every medication on the market.

Our insight was to take advantage of the frustration sufferers feel at the control allergies have over them. They are at their wit's end. So:

Rather than make the expected claims and promises, Reactine offered them a chance to regain control – and exact revenge on the allergies that had annoyed them for so many years.

We wrapped this in a humorous portrayal of revenge in English and French creative. The first TV ad shows a sufferer taunting a ragweed plant. 'Hey Mr Ragweed. You've annoyed me for years. Now it's my turn to annoy you!' Later TV ads 'Maid to Order' and 'Group Therapy' took the same approach and extended the campaign through 1998. Print ads showed the joy of getting back at ragweed and pollen, and followed this with revenge against cats and dust.²

Allergy sufferers were laughing instead of suffering.

RESULTS

As expected, OTC sales grew partly at the expense of the prescription business as Reactine was now readily available at retail. Most importantly, total brand sales grew significantly. This demonstrated that we had not just converted prescription users, but had attracted new users to the franchise, see [Figure 1](#).

The results were not only immediate, but also sustained. Reactine became the #1 regular antihistamine in every market where the advertising appeared. Despite continued aggressive competitive activity, Reactine continued to build share throughout the year after year evolution of the 'Revenge' campaign, see [Figure 2](#).

ISOLATING ADVERTISING AS THE VARIABLE

The launch was in May 1995. Research in September 1995 demonstrated that advertising had been a key factor in attracting new users, showing higher un-aided brand recall for Reactine (at 47%) than Claritin, even though our main competitor's media spend greatly outweighed ours.

Advertising breakthrough

For '**Revenge.**' September 1995.

In the past few weeks do you recall seeing any

television commercials for allergy medications?

Yes.....66%

For what brands do you recall TV advertising?

Unaided

Claritin.....41%

Reactine.....47%

Source: Market Facts. Tele Nation Omnibus.

Furthermore, 74% of consumers reported they liked the launch ad, proving that our insight had indeed connected.

Advertising Appreciation

For '**Revenge.**' September 1995.

Top Box: Like the ad very much.....34%

Top 2 Boxes: Like the ad very much.....74%

Source: Market Facts. Tele Nation Omnibus.

Most importantly, this connection translated to sales motivation, with 65% of consumers expressing a positive purchase intent only 4 weeks after the launch of "Revenge" creative.

Purchase Intention

For '**Revenge.**' September 1995.

Very likely to buy on next purchase occasion.....21%

Very/Somewhat likely to buy.....65%

Source: Market Facts. Tele Nation Omnibus.

In summary, a highly successful launch, driven by advertising, against a powerful competitor.

(Editor's note: The 'full case' would have included an analysis of spending, distribution, pricing, display, sales promotion, etc.)

CROSSOVER NOTES

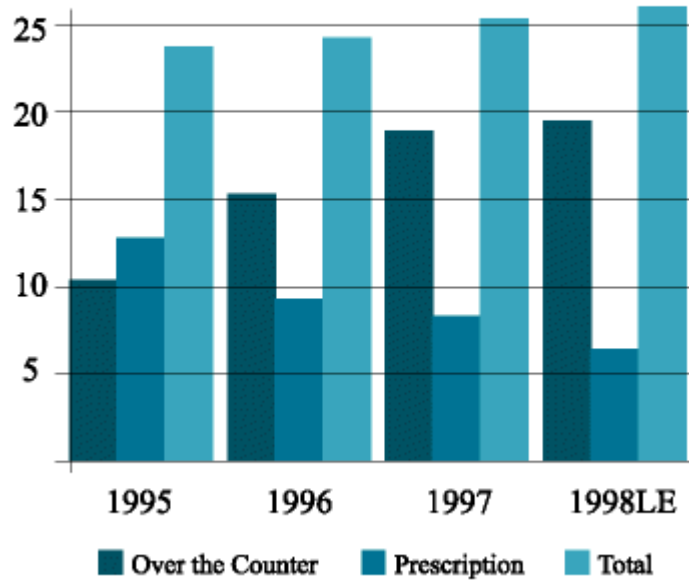
1. Head to Head Competition. For another perspective on this battle, see the [Claritin](#) case in CASSIES III. Compare also Sunlight versus Tide in this book.

2. Humour in a Serious Category. Allergy sufferers don't find their condition remotely funny. Yet Reactine still developed successful, funny advertising. This paradox was a notable feature of CASSIES III.

NOTES & EXHIBITS

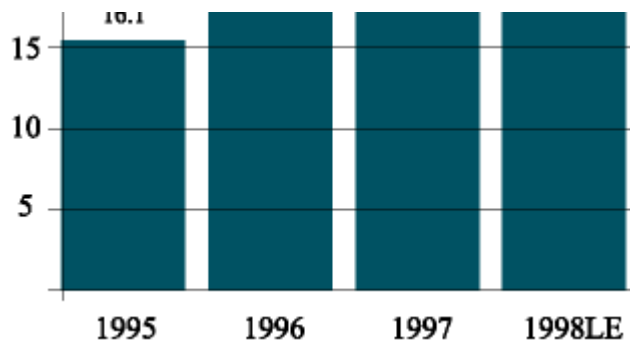
FIGURE 1

Reactine's Sales - \$Millions



Source: Factory Sales

FIGURE 2



Reactine Market Share - %



Nielsen & Share Data: Drug + Pharm: 12 mths rolling to M/A