

Sunlight Laundry Detergent

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Executive Summary

'Gentlemen, I propose an immediate full scale invasion of the United States. Yes, I know they are many times bigger than us. And yes I know they are better funded than us. And yes, I know that they have been the predominant superpower for the last fifty years. And I also know that our seven invasion attempts have left us in a weaker position than we were going in. Nevertheless, I know I can count on your complete support in this campaign.'

Overheard at the Meeting of the Canadian Joint Chiefs of Staff, Penetanguishene, Ontario, January 1998.

If this sounds ridiculous, may we turn your attention to the laundry category.

A year and a half ago (Editor's note i.e. in mid-1997) Sunlight laundry detergent faced the following questions: How do you challenge a brand that has been #1 for as long as anyone can remember, is synonymous with the category, outspends you year after year, has 3 times your share, and is one of the best known brands in existence? Further, how do you rally the troops one last time to take on a brand that has shown itself to be impregnable to competitive activity?

This paper will describe how Sunlight's 'Go ahead. Get dirty.' campaign, launched April 1998, finally put a dent in the armour of Tide. It will show national business and research results that are directly attributable to the campaign. It will show how shipment and dollar growth outstripped market growth by over 400%. And it will show how Sunlight sourced its share directly from Tide, despite taking a 9.5% price increase only months into the campaign.

And it will prove that nothing is more valuable than a good idea.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Sunlight was the number two brand, but share dropped from over 17% in 1992 to 13% in 1997—while Tide increased from 38% to 46%. Profit pressures had led to cost savings in Sunlight's formula, with a consumer-noticeable decline in performance. Meanwhile, Tide continued with year after year of product innovations, heavily supported with aggressive and consistent problem/solution advertising. By December 97, Tide had a significant advantage over Sunlight on all key attributes.¹

TABLE 1: PERFORMANCE PERCEPTIONS – DEC 1997

	Sunlight	Tide
Gets the whole wash clean	60%	90%
Removes ground-in dirt	47%	73%
Gets my laundry white	52%	82%
Gets my coloureds really bright	51%	76%

Source: Tandemar Tracking December 97. % Top 3 boxes on a 10 point scale.

The situation was critical. Sunlight was Lever Pond's biggest brand. The company decided to wage one final battle. And if we weren't successful, Sunlight would no longer get any significant advertising support.

This meant investment—the first and critical step being a product reformulation that matched Sunlight's cleaning ability to Tide's.²

That was the easy part. Convincing consumers that Sunlight could actually handle the tough stuff was another story, since they were all too familiar with 'new and improved' claims in the laundry category.

For years, Sunlight's advertising had focused on after-wash sensory benefits (scent and freshness) and an appealing personality. Sunlight was well-liked, with strong personality equities, but this was not linked to tough cleaning. One thing was clear—if we couldn't convince people that Sunlight got the whole wash clean (including the tough stuff)

likeability and personality would not motivate them to buy.

In other words, consumers liked Sunlight, but they didn't respect it.

Respect meant addressing Sunlight's perceived (but no longer actual) performance weakness in our advertising. But a performance strategy was risky. Tide had been the gold standard for superior/tough cleaning for so many years that unless Sunlight could talk performance in a distinct way, our advertising would likely be attributed to Tide.³

STRATEGY AND EXECUTION

Strategy

If Tide owned clean, it would be suicide for Sunlight to try to take that away from them head-on. They had a thirty-year headstart. We needed another way in.

Qualitative groups in early 1998 revealed that laundry advertising typically set up that dirty clothes were 'bad' (Tide's problem/solution approach). However, further probing uncovered that while dirty clothes were a drag, getting them dirty wasn't. In fact, it was fun.

This was our insight. Sunlight would let you get dirty because no matter how dirty you get, Sunlight gets your clothes clean. Put another way: if Tide owned clean, we would own dirt.⁴

This went to focus groups as commercial concepts with the tagline: 'Go ahead. Get dirty.' The response was overwhelmingly positive. Moms said no laundry detergent had spoken to them this way. It was liberating and fun, but most importantly for Sunlight, it was confident. Sunlight could clean anything, despite the lack of the side by side demo and 'new and improved'. In any event, the side by side demo was Tide's territory, and including it would probably cause consumers to confuse Sunlight's advertising

with Tide's.

EXECUTION

Creative

The creative idea was to demonstrate a feeling of freedom—the enjoyment of getting clothes dirty without worry because Sunlight will get them clean.

This talks to everybody, and is particularly relevant to Moms with kids. All Moms want their kids to have fun, and getting dirty is part of that. The first two TV commercials, 'Magnetic Mud' and 'Whee', tap into this Mom insight. The freedom to live life, however, transcends kids. Lovers will go through anything to be together, as in 'Embrace', the third TV spot. The freedom to live life also transcends TV.

Media

We found another way in via secondary media—with the objective of establishing the new attitude, and building awareness of 'Sunlight. Go ahead. Get dirty.' Tide is traditionally in TV and print. We looked for places where consumers wouldn't normally expect to find a laundry detergent ad.

Fashion and clothes go together and laundry and clothes go together. Why not fashion and laundry? We ran a five page, one-time insertion ('Handle Without Care') in the top fashion and women's service magazines.⁵ Also, since most dirt is outside, we needed to be there too. We had painted buses, showing splattered mud on the outside, and people of all ages having fun getting dirty on the inside.

Finally, what could demonstrate confidence better than a money-back guarantee? In Western Canada, we used a post-it note on the front page of the newspaper to lead readers to the money-back guarantee inside.

Results

In the first full year following the launch of 'Go ahead. Get dirty.' Sunlight's unit and dollars sales increased by 28% and 31% respectively, in a market that increased 3% in volume and 7% in dollars.

TABLE 2: NATIONAL VOLUME vs. YEAR AGO

Sunlight Unit Sales	+28%
Sunlight \$ Sales	+31%
Category Unit Sales	+3%
Category \$ Sales	+7%

Source: Lever Pond's. April 98 – March 99 versus April 97 – March 98.

Even more striking, we were able to examine the effect on non-promoted sales, using the AC Nielsen Monitor database. This allowed us to extract the effect of promotional activity, and isolate the underlying sales momentum. In a category that is highly promoted, Sunlight achieved a 32% increase in non-promoted sales, despite a 9.5% price increase in August 1998.⁶

The strong sales results had a direct impact on Sunlight's market share. Nationally, Sunlight gained 2.5 share points (achieving the targeted short-term goal) while Tide lost 2.3 points. See [Figure 1](#) and [Figure 2](#).

isolating advertising as the variable

While the product reformulation was a critical first step in Sunlight's turnaround, simply having a good product (as we know from the past, and from other products in the category) doesn't guarantee success. There are a number of measures that demonstrate the causal effect of the 'Go ahead. Get dirty.' advertising on Sunlight's success.

1. As noted, non-promoted sales (sales at regular price, no discounts, promotions or coupons) increased over 30%, despite a 9.5% price increase.
2. Creative testing of 'Magnetic Mud' and 'Embrace' showed an above-average purchase intent among the Sunlight target. (See [Figure 3](#))
3. Performance attributes—via in-market tracking—showed a stronger Sunlight, and a slightly weakened Tide.⁷ (See Table 3.)

TABLE 3: PERFORMANCE PERCEPTIONS – DEC 98 vs. DEC 97

	Sunlight		Tide	
	Dec 97	Dec 98	Dec 97	Dec 98
Gets the whole wash clean	60%	70%	90%	86%
Removes ground-in dirt	47%	50%	73%	78%
Gets my laundry white	52%	58%	82%	82%
Gets my coloureds really bright	51%	59%	76%	69%

Source: Tandemar Tracking Dec 97 and Dec 98. % Top 3 boxes on a 10 point scale

FOOTNOTES

1. Perception and Reality. In the strictest sense, the consumer belief about a brand's performance is always a perception, because it is an impression in the consumer's mind. However (especially in functional categories such as cleaning products) that perception is heavily influenced by the reality of the product's functional performance. The case is telling us that Sunlight was not as good as Tide on functional performance, and also had a weaker image.

2. The Importance of Product. In the 80s and part of the 90s North American business was tempted by the notion that 'clever marketing' could overcome a weak product. This folly came home to roost as offshore products (initially Japanese and European) took over huge shares in many markets. Given the costs of fixing the product, the temptation to rely on 'clever marketing' will always be there. This case is a salutary lesson about the importance of fixing the product as a first step.

3. Distinctiveness, but How? We all agree that distinctiveness is essential. Some practitioners have taken this to mean that you should not fight for the same strategic territory. This is a mistake. Here, Sunlight decides to fight Tide on performance, which is Tide's territory, but Sunlight will find an entirely new way to do it. Dove (See Cassies III and Cassies 99) decides to fight Ivory on mildness. Duracell and Energizer have been fighting for 'long lasting' since the arrival of the Energizer Bunny. Of course, it is sometimes right to pick a different strategic territory (for example 7-Up's famous use of the Un-Cola). There is no cookie-cutter answer.

4. Problem versus Opportunity. All the CASSIES 99 winners were based on an insight, repeating a pattern that started with CASSIES I. Often, as in this case, the key was to toss away conventional wisdom. For generations, marketers have had the mantra 'don't focus on the problem, focus on the solution', and in the detergent market the mantra was 'focus on clean, not dirt.' As Sunlight shows, this is not an absolute truth. Sometimes the problem is the opportunity.

5. Media Innovation. The 'fashion insert' breaks conventional wisdom, and you will see this repeated in the AGF case. In a famous example from several years ago, Campbell's in the US ran an ad for their soup in the Wall Street Journal. This was clearly 'wrong' for the homemaker target audience, but it had a powerful, positive ripple effect on morale, and recruiting at the company.

6. Cause and Effect. As databases become more sophisticated, reliable techniques are coming on-stream for isolating the effects of marketing investments. Some of these were presented at an ICA Seminar in Toronto (Measuring Advertising Effectiveness) June 2, 1999.

7. Perception and Reality. It's worth noting that the change in perceptions is driving results, not the absolute levels, where Tide still leads on all dimensions. Although this may seem obvious, it is easy for companies to get complacent with the 'absolute scores' in this type of research, and not see the risks and opportunities associated with change.

Note re the Grand Prix:

What attracted the judges to this case was the sheer magnitude of the Sunlight turnaround—and the powerful creative—in a battle against one of the most formidable brands in the world. In big flat markets for everyday products, growth rates of 30+% are unprecedented, especially without the helping hand of sales promotion and trade allowances.

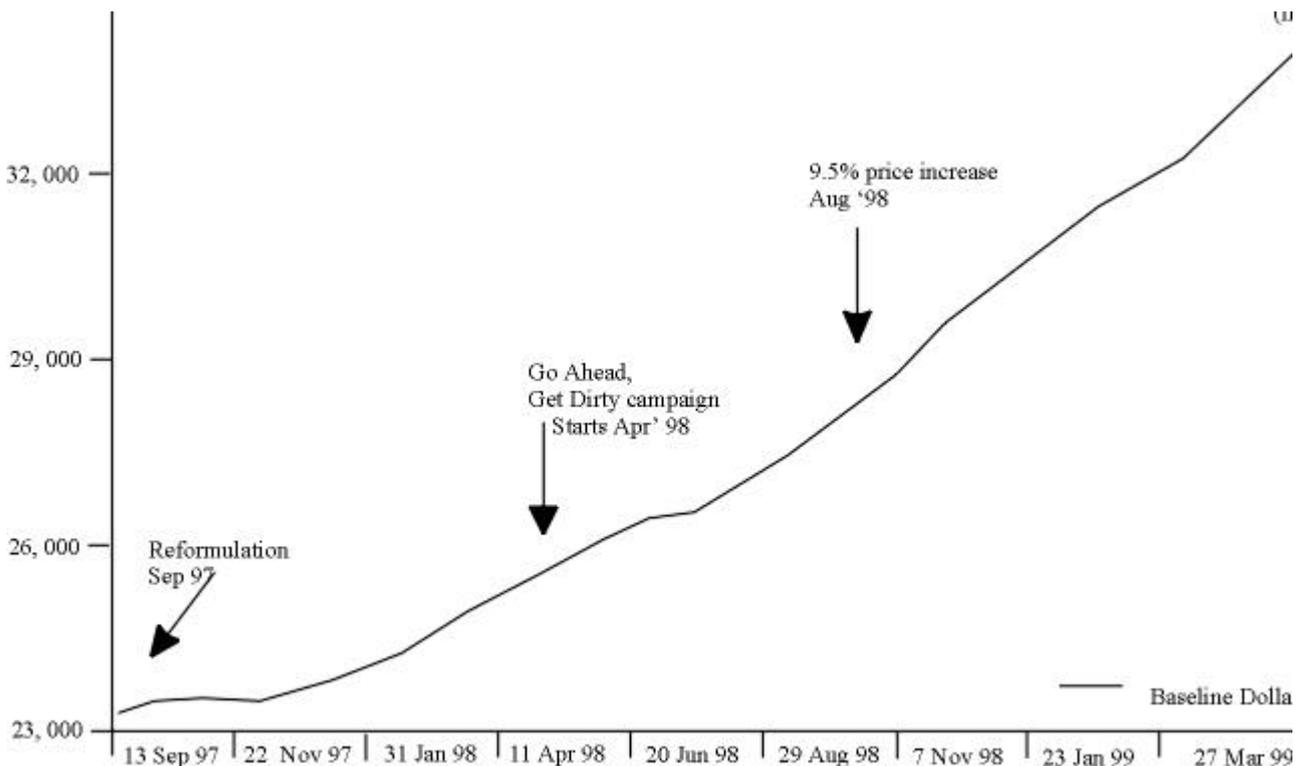
This case is also an excellent example of breaking conventional wisdom. To those not familiar with packaged goods, it may seem improbable that 'you have to focus on clean, not dirt' could be an unwritten rule that drove the advertising for at least a generation, but so it was. It takes insight to realize that an unwritten rule is stifling innovation, and it takes courage to break it.



<http://www.warc.com>

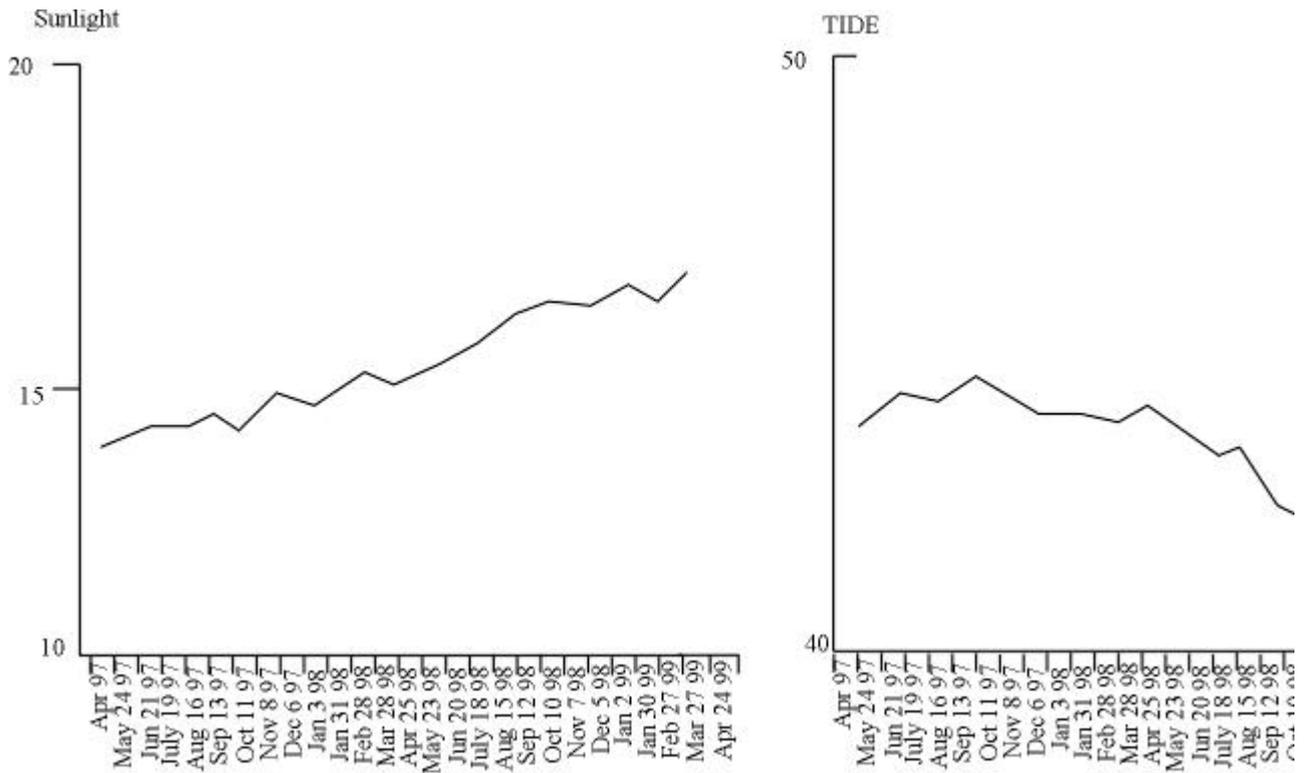
NOTES & EXHIBITS

FIGURE 1:



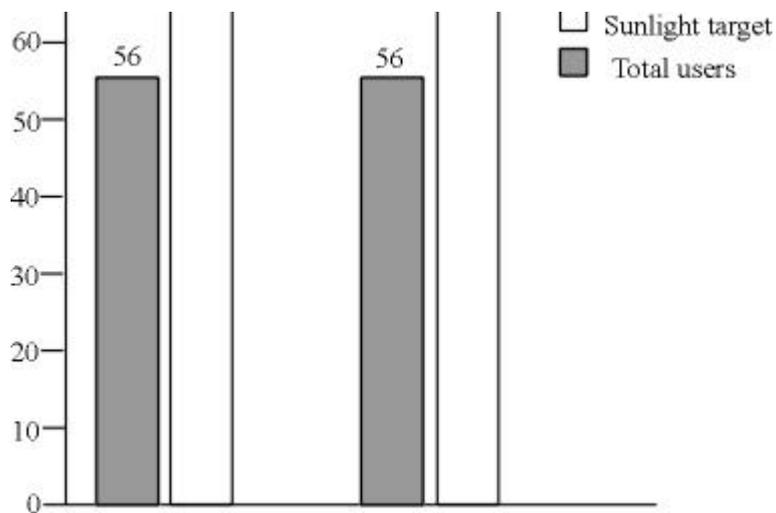
Source: Nielsen Monitor database, rolling 52 weekly data, Jan 17, 1998–Mar 27, 1999

FIGURE 2:



Source: AC Nielsen Monitor database, rolling share, (base year to case year)

FIGURE 3:





Source: Millward Brown Testing – 'Magnetic Mud' – 'Embrace'
