

Canadian Advertising Success Stories 1999

Les Rôtisseries St-Hubert Ltée

Agency: St-Jacques Vallée, Young & Rubicam
Authors: F. Langis; S. Gagnon, M. Van Houtte, C. de Carufel, H. Léger, C. Jarvis,
R. Nadeau

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'The greatest difficulty in the world is not for people to accept new ideas, but to make old ideas' – John Maynard Keynes, economist.

This was the challenge confronting les Rôtisseries St-Hubert in 1997; needing to keep its loyal but aging clientele, and attract new clients.¹

St-Hubert enjoys a history of almost fifty years. As the dominant leader of Québec family type restaurants, it has been, and remains, the touchstone of BBQ chicken—with a pre-eminent place in the heart and soul of Québécois. During the past few years, however, this had become more fragile. There had been a proliferation of new 'fast-food' chains, and a new category of 'casual' restaurants—with menu, atmosphere and ambiance appealing very broadly. To cap it all, St-Hubert had a new adversary; supermarkets offering home meal replacements.

The status quo was not an option, and in 1996, St-Hubert started a major renovation programme. New advertising was then needed to revitalize the brand, and announce promotional offers. This campaign had to broaden St-Hubert's appeal to loyal and new clients. New advertising launched in Fall 1997, and after 18 months momentum is up in all areas. Penetration of Québec households is up from 49% to 64%—remarkable for a leader facing such stiff competition. Share of the chicken restaurant market has gone from 63% to 79% i.e. four out of every five dollars spent by Québécois.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

In 1951, Hélène and René Léger invested their savings to launch a BBQ rotisserie where, for a modest sum, customers could enjoy succulent roast chicken, fries and coleslaw, bread, and a lightly seasoned sauce which was to become a legend. Very soon, the rotisserie on rue St-Hubert became famous.

The Légers began to develop the first chain of restaurants in Québec. This was marked by several innovations, including the first free delivery service in Canada. Through the 50s and 60s, St-Hubert became the family restaurant of choice in Québec. St-Hubert advertising campaigns (such as 'Everything is so tasty', and 'You give me that taste') always concentrated on exquisite flavour, rich in the tradition of a master roaster.

However, as time went by, new competitors arrived. Their advertising took a different approach. Whether direct competitors (chains such as Kentucky Fried, Au Coq, Benny, Swiss Chalet) or indirect (family restaurants such as Georgio, Pacini, Au Vieux Duluth, La Cage aux Sports), they

emphasized promotional offers. Slowly but surely, the value-price ratio of St-Hubert came under pressure. For the first time, the St-Hubert franchise suffered erosion.

At the beginning of the nineties, St-Hubert completely re-vamped its menu. Portions were increased. Offers such as 'Midi-Express' (a light snack at an affordable price) were added. And the table-d'hôte offered a variety of complete evening meals at reasonable cost. New advertising ('You're kidding!') delivered more of a sales pitch, and the business recovered in growth and profitability.

But this was not enough. Competition became even more aggressive. The other chicken chains adopted promotional practices from the fast-food market, again eroding St-Hubert's value-for-money image. Then the 'casual' restaurants emerged (Moe's, Casey's, Chez Better, Nickel). They attracted young customers—who felt a certain degree of boredom with St-Hubert. Meanwhile, the delivery and take-out service had to compete with supermarkets selling prepared food.

It was obvious that we had to bring St-Hubert up to date. This started with a major renovation programme in 1996. It featured an enclosed dining room with a children's activity centre and a grillardin, a café-bar called St-Hub, a patio, and a take-out counter. (2)

Now, advertising had to bring the people in.

STRATEGY AND EXECUTION

Strategy

1. Target baby-boomers. They are the largest segment of the population, with the highest discretionary food income, and the most teenagers and younger children. The vast majority know the St-Hubert taste and are likely to be attracted to the rejuvenated chain. Aim principally at men and families—which are under-represented in the present clientele.
2. Exploit the advantages in each operating sector (the dining room, the café-bar St-Hub, delivery, and take out).
3. Build on the sentimental attachment to the St-Hubert brand.

For the dining room, competing against family restaurants, six aspects would be promoted at different times of year: the 'table d'hôte' for its delicious variety; the 'midi-express' for people who want to a quick lunch at little cost; the 'Fête après Fêtes' throughout January to satisfy tightened budgets; the 'mois des grillades' (mixed grill month) for those eager to explore; the 'mardis rigolos' (happy Tuesdays) for mothers and children who want to enjoy St-Hubert cheaply; 'l'été gourmet' (gourmet summer) for those who like patio dining and the freshness of summer produce.

For the café-bar St-Hub, competing chiefly against the 'casual' sector, the emphasis would be on relaxation and conviviality.

For delivery service, competing mainly against chicken, pizza and Chinese food chains, the message would highlight the speedy and practical 'family meal for four.'

For take-out, competing against chicken chains and supermarkets, the story would be economy, carried by the 'Economix'—two complete chicken meals for only \$5.25 per person.

Execution

Québécois know St-Hubert and hold in very high regard. We had to find a distinctive, original advertising idea to capture this love of the brand, and deliver all the different promotional messages. We needed an idea that would hold all this together. The answer was a 'template' that would be repeated throughout the campaign—a comic slice of life, chosen to appeal to each target audience, setting up a food problem.

- A cockscomb mnemonic (borrowed from the famous St-Hubert logo) over the heads of the characters—to represent the solution.
- The promotional message.
- The signature: 'It's gon'na be good.'

The campaign launched on TV in October 1997. Over the next 18 months, we produced 16 commercials (3 x 15s, 12 x 30s, one 60) for 14 promotional windows.

The campaign started with three 15 second teasers, introducing the comic scenario, the cockscomb, and 'It's gon'na be good'. They launched on the CIRPA/ADISQ Foundation gala, a high-rating broadcast showcasing top Québec singing artists. During this same broadcast, we also aired the first 30 ('Hunting') announcing the table d'hôte offering.

The minimalist template allowed us to broadcast several new messages, all contributing momentum for the brand, while showing the renewal going on at the chain. (3), (4)

One year later, we again sponsored CIRPA/ADISQ. The Molson Centre was filled and Céline Dion was co-host of ceremonies. We ran three 60-second commercials, featuring Jean-Pierre Léger, president of the company and son of the founder. In a up-close interview, he shared the highlights of the St-Hubert tradition and his vision for the years ahead.

RESULTS

St-Hubert grew significantly faster than the market, not only increasing share of total market, but more importantly, increasing share of chicken restaurants to 79% (see Table 1):

TABLE 1

Share	97	98	99	Index (99 over 97)
Share of total market	11%	13%	14%	(127)
Share of chicken restaurants	63%	66%	79%	(125)

*Based on dining room sales. Source: Saine Marketing follow-up study.

Business also increased in all the operating sectors, meeting or exceeding objectives (see Table 2):

TABLE 2

Within the total market	97	98	99	Index 99 over 97)
Share of dining room	8%	9%	11%	(137)
Share of delivery	17%	23%	23%	(135)
Share of take-out	0%	20%	24%	(120)

Source: Saine Marketing follow-up study.

There was a significant increase in HH penetration across all three sectors and in frequency of visits. (Editor's note: data was supplied.) (see Table 3)

TABLE 3

	97	98	99	Index (99 over 97)
Household Penetration				
Dining room	49%	58%	64%	(131)
Delivery	18%	24%	26%	(144)
Take-out	18%	19%	22%	(122)

Source: Saine Marketing follow-up study.

Also in line with objectives, we shifted the client profile younger, with 'baby boomers and kids' becoming our biggest patrons—see the 30.3 and 27.4 figures achieved in 1998 (see Table 4):

TABLE 4

Share of Dining Occasions	96	97	98	Index (98 over 96)
65+	13.9%	9.7%	10.2%	
50-64	28.4%	23.6%	19.1%	
35-49	21.3%	24.2%	30.3%	(142)
25-34	16.0%	15.4%	12.5%	
kids-24	19.0%	26.1%	27.4%	(144)

Source: Crest Canada pre-post study—12 months ending August of each year.

Isolating Advertising as the Variable

The turnaround owes a great deal to the 1996 re-modelling, and promotional activity is essential in the business. However, the following points show the significant role of advertising:

1. Spontaneous recognition among all restaurant chains rose from 14% pre the campaign to 36% in 1999 (Saine Marketing).
2. Spontaneous recognition in the chicken sector rose from 57% pre the campaign to 81% in 1999 (Saine Marketing).
3. In 1998 and 1999, advertising recall for St-Hubert was the second highest (33%) in

the restaurant market, behind only McDonald's (41%) which does twice as much advertising (Saine Marketing).

4. The red crest cockscorn, a new advertising property, has created a very close association with St-Hubert and its positive brand values. A survey by Décarie & Complices showed that 62% of respondents recognized the brand advertised without prompting, compared to a norm of 43%.
5. The index for St-Hubert's quality-price ratio was measured for the first time in 1999 and showed that St-Hubert had the best quality-price ratio of all the national family restaurant chains (Saine Marketing).
6. Ad spending was not a factor. Although it increased somewhat from historical levels, this was because of the growth, which funded an increase in line with percent of sales.
7. Lastly, while not 'hard' evidence, the TVB, in its Retail 1998 contest, rated four of the commercials among the best ten retail commercials in Canada. This contest is judged by consumers who rate their enjoyment of a commercial and their incentive to buy.

CROSSOVER NOTES

1. Turning a Battleship Around. Although the categories and target audiences are very different, the challenge was similar to that faced by Molson Canadian, a Gold winner in CASSIES III. ([back](#))
2. Keeping a brand up to date. It is a big marketing challenge, especially given the investments involved, to keep a retail brand up to date. Eaton's and Marks & Spencer in Canada are two examples of many that have failed. Loblaws and Sears are fascinating stories on the success side of the ledger. ([back](#))
3. Handling multiple messages. The 'template' is quite common for handling multiple messages. Note that it does not have to be rigid. McDonald's, Zellers, Swiss Chalet, IBM, hold their campaigns together with a variety of techniques, including things as subtle as the tone of voice. One of the most famous examples of this is Volkswagen, with various executions on reliability over several years, all very different, and all held together by the distinctive Volkswagen attitude. ([back](#))
4. Evolving a long-running campaign. The 'template' is also one of the techniques for evolving a campaign. (See becel, Fido and AGF, and many examples in CASSIES III).



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