

Marketing campaign fueled by hybrid theme

Integrated Marketing Communications in the University of Tennessee's College of Business Administration is a senior-level, marketing elective. As a team-based class, students are asked to apply their four years of business knowledge training to develop an integrated marketing communications plan for an organization.

Students recently worked with the Coca-Cola Co. in developing a yearlong national marketing program to enhance image, revenue, and profitability of its citrus soft drink, Vault.

Brand: Citrus flavors are the second largest category in the soft-drink category, after cola products. Coca-Cola has launched multiple brands against Mountain Dew, which dominates the category. Coke's latest citrus entry is Vault, its most successful citrus brand

to date. At the time of this project, Vault was positioned as a hybrid drink, offering both soda refreshment and energy.

Students: Bridget Bourne, Morgan Cox, Lauren Hanna, Caroline Howell and Meredith Wright, supervised by Cindy Raines, course lecturer and director of communications for the College of Business Administration.

Approach: Analyzing both its own customer research and data provided by Vault, the students evaluated the drink's positioning, customer attitudes, competitive offerings, niche opportunities and pricing strategies. They looked at key messaging — what does Vault want to communicate — traditional marketing avenues (print, broadcast, outdoor, etc.); non-traditional ways of going to market (guerilla, viral and street market-

ing); the Internet; point-of-sale; editorial coverage; sampling; and coupons.

"Our marketing approach was fun and innovative, characteristics that appeal to our target audience," Wright said. "Today's under-25-year-old consumer is not looking for the ordinary. Our marketing plan needed to break through the clutter to make an impact."

Result: The students identified their target audience as individuals ages 16 to 25 who are active and adventurous. Although their marketing plan was national in scope, it focused more heavily in the Southeast to capitalize on the strength of Vault and the citrus category.

Product trials were a big component of the plan because the students were targeting non-Vault-drinkers. The team discovered its target market found the idea and taste of the hybrid energy-soda very appealing. With Vault's repeat-purchase rate, the students believed that with product trials, they could gain many repeat purchasers.

However, they also found out that Vault's current marketing approach needed a facelift.

The team developed an integrated marketing plan around simple messaging — "Drink a hybrid. Grab a Vault!"

"We believed that Vault is the category's first hybrid beverage, and we wanted to take advantage of this positioning," Hanna said. "We also believed that our message helped clarify for the consumer exactly what Vault was."

Humor in being able to hybridize one's fantasy was the creative used throughout the campaign. For instance, for the female audience, one print ad asked the reader to hybridize nutritious food (such as broccoli) with delicious, comfort food (such as chocolate). The male scenario hybridized "boy's night out" with "girlfriend being

happy." The reader then hybridized energy with refreshing good taste. The result was Vault.

All ads extensively used the Vault green color to reinforce the product, which is green.

Suggested media included regional television, national print, Internet banner advertising, a new interactive Web site and buzz-generating public relations activities.

The students suggested that Vault include an interactive game on its Web site that allowed the visitor to hybridize his or her fantasy and produce an avatar showing the combination. The students hoped this game would "become viral" and be forwarded through e-mail.

The students also suggested that the Web site allow the visitor to recommend new hybrid ideas for second-generation ads, enter a contest to win a hybrid automobile and download free Vault coupons (one per visitor).

The group planned on the uniqueness of the hybrid game, its consumer-generated ad program and the contest to generate editorial coverage and public relations opportunities in local media.

"Brands constantly need to evolve their campaigns, and this process allowed us to have students currently in our target market recommend messages and media channels they know to be personally relevant," said Neil Golson, brand manager for Vault. "It's really a win-win for everyone involved, and I could tell the students' thinking really had benefited from a real-world application of what they are learning in the classroom."

Case Study is provided by the University of Tennessee College of Business Administration. Companies and organizations interested in participating as clients should contact Cindy Raines at craines1@utk.edu.