

Where my bees at?

Häagen-Dazs: HD Loves HB
2009 Jay Chiat Planning Awards Entry



Häagen-Dazs loves Honey Bees

Summary

This paper was co-authored by a brand strategist and a communication strategist at an advertising agency.

This is not standard operating procedure for the Chiat Awards. However, it's the norm for how we've been working with each other.

The paper we're submitting is about a lot of things—sales stagnation, what to do when there is no money, PR partnerships, the creation of “assets” and actions rather than advertising, ice cream and bees, collapsing boundaries between something inside and outside of advertising—as well as collapsing the boundaries within advertising agencies themselves.

It's about making a flavor. And about making a brand behave more like a verb and less like a noun. Which sounds odd but we'll explain what we mean.

Oh, and it's about sending a client to Capitol Hill to testify before Congress.

“Advertising” objectives are getting stranger and stranger these days.

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Umlauts and Vermont

Umlauts don't help advertising budgets and Häagen-Dazs (the only ice cream with an ä) faced an uphill battle in 2007.

After successive price hikes, sales stalled and consumption reversed for the first time in four years.

As margins shrank so did budgets and a brand that had a lot to say lacked the means to say it.

To add to the problems, Häagen-Dazs' archrival in Vermont, Ben & Jerry's, had the kind of "mojo in market" that we couldn't match. Despite having spent less money, spontaneous awareness of Ben & Jerry's outshone ours.

We faced a trifecta of problems. Häagen-Dazs needed to revitalize sales, inject dynamism back into the brand and make a disproportionate noise on a shrinking budget.

A verb, not a noun

Part of the Häagen-Dazs problem was that the brand was respected and admired but was not necessarily a “participative space” (as the consultants like to call these things). Through astute and sometimes outrageous partnerships, Ben & Jerry’s created a verb-like ice cream brand full of media dialogue and fun. By comparison, classic, quality-driven Häagen-Dazs felt like a noun. Admirable, but not something you could do much with.

A first and best decision was to recognize that the brand needed currency: a “media-multiplying” story to tell beyond our ice cream.

On smaller-than-2007 budgets, we set a goal of 125 million impressions over 12 months to help repair the hole in the 2008 budget. With our PR partner, we decided to generate story-telling “assets” to engage the media and the audience, and not use just a standard “press release” approach.

Our clients had achieved similar levels of media interest partnering with American Idol. They thought that goal was viable. But that had been with the biggest show in America.

And we had no story to tell.

A smarter partnership and the blogosphere

At this point the strategist usually demonstrates through a deft sleight of hand how they guided everyone towards the end goal. That didn't happen.

What the strategist did was recognize that while they clearly understood the problem, the communications strategist had something that the rest of us did not—an idea based on three loosely connected elements.

- i) Since 2004, Häagen-Dazs had marketed itself on the platform of “Made like no other” from all-natural ingredients—this separated it from “Tastes like Stephen Colbert” pints of Ben & Jerry's.
- ii) Through conversations in 2006 and 2007 we understood that Häagen-Dazs consumers were increasingly worried about what they eat and what kind of food footprint they leave. Forget earnest stereotypes of Prius-driving, Michael Pollan-reading “locavores.” Think of a mainstream America more aware of issues of sustainability and environmentalism and wanting to do something about it. “All natural” fit nicely in here—but how to bring it to life? (Source: Agency Qualitative Research, 2006-2007)
- iii) Meanwhile, the communication strategist kept a blog. More important, she had come across a disquieting story about bees that instantly connected to the “Made like no other” philosophy.

CCD and HD

Apis mellifera (honey bees) play a pivotal role in a multi-billion dollar industry based on the intensive pollination of fruit, nuts and berries. Nature's workforce—the bees—are ultimately tied to one-third of the foods we eat on a daily basis. (Source: US Department of Agriculture).

However, the problem for the bees (and us) is that since 2005, one-third of the U.S. bee population has disappeared and nobody knows why. Based on this trajectory, the bees would face extinction by 2012.

The issue had been on the media horizon among the scientific community and other specialists. Pesticides? Parasites? Cell towers? The concretization of America? The theories flew. But by 2007 it had begun to be picked up by bloggers and a specialist issue had begun to work its way into the mainstream.

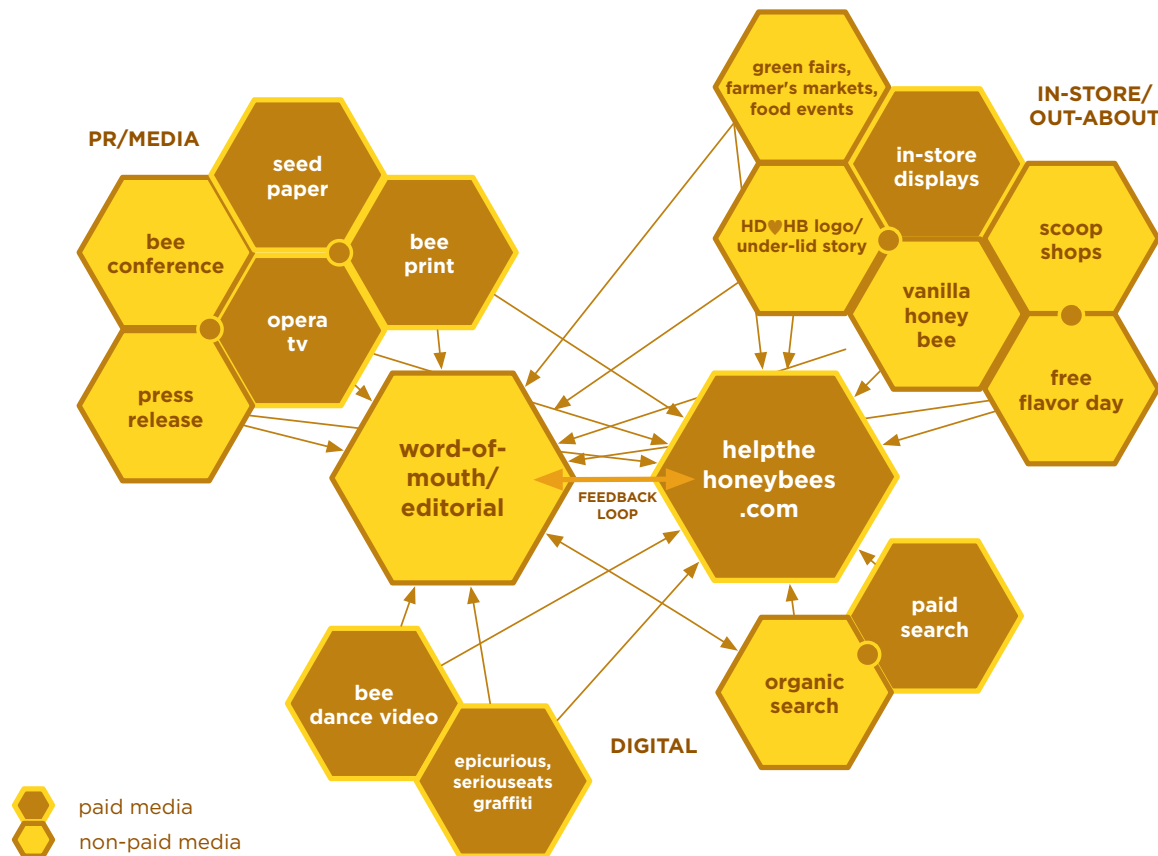
What looked at first like an “interesting but not immediate” issue began to take on a different perspective—particularly for Häagen-Dazs.

Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) threatens U.S. agriculture and poses a “clear and present danger” to bowls of ice cream. Fewer bees equals less pollination and fewer natural ingredients. With a shortage of natural ingredients there would either be significant increases in raw materials prices, or 40% of Häagen-Dazs pollination-dependent flavors would disappear off the shelves.

Our “hub” idea was based on a simple piece of ice cream self-interest: “An all natural ice cream needs an all-natural workforce to survive.”

The catalytic principle

The “HD Loves HB” campaign was less creative-then-media-and-then-PR and was more of an all-at-once meshing of different elements. The campaign worked by catalytic reaction—each asset sparking another media conversation or consumer action.



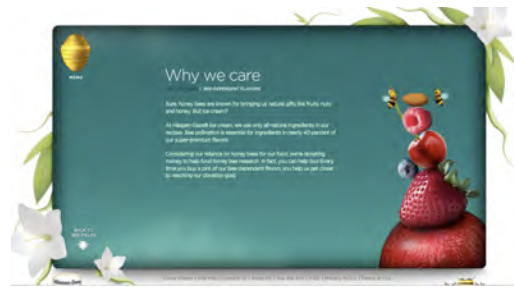
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Start with a flavor

- i) **Starting out:** In early 2008 Häagen-Dazs announced the campaign to the beekeeping and scientific community with a \$250,000 grant to Penn State and UC Davis. A “bee board” of researchers and beekeepers served as resources for the press.
- ii) **Make a flavor:** We cemented the bee’s connection to our products at a critical place: the freezer aisle. We created a new flavor, Vanilla Honey Bee, made from the work of the bees and with profits going to CCD research—presenting a hero for the effort. Meanwhile, the **“HD loves HB”** logo identified all “bee-dependent” flavors in the ice cream cabinet.
- iii) **Spread the word:** Helpthehoneybees.com educated consumers about CCD, linked to resources, let them buy a shirt or send a bee-mail (OK, corny but cute). We connected our consumers’ passion for food to the bees, using recipe search on Epicurious.com to highlight bee-dependent ingredients and a short film by the founder of SeriousEats to illustrate the impact of CCD.



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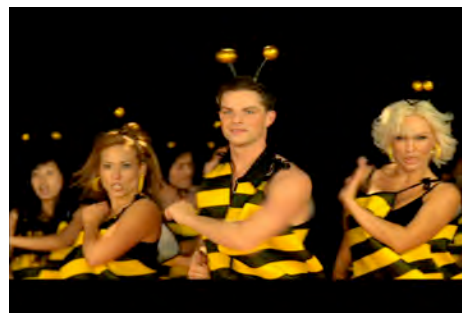
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Create more assets and actions

- iv) **Take this page and plant it:** A plantable print insert, embedded with seeds to grow bee-friendly flowers. The insert provided a “creative action” piece encapsulating the issue—and proved irresistible for story-hungry journalists.
- v) **“Best PSA EVAH”:** Playing off the fact that bees “dance” to communicate, we created two made-for-next-to-nothing videos and seeded them across blogs and video networks. Think of them as a cross between “crumping” and a campier version of Saturday Night Fever. The videos were contagious and the tuberati gave the effort a thumbs-up.
- vi) **Free is good:** We gave away free samples of Vanilla Honey Bee and millions of seeds at farmers markets and green events. You even may have found an HD seed packet in the back of your organic denim jeans (yes, bees pollinate cotton—the fewer the bees, the more expensive the denim).
- vii) **Ad-like objects:** A 30-second tragedy about an un-pollinated relationship between a bee and a flower, and a print ad highlighted the CCD problem in more mainstream media. Reach was not massive (the TV spot debuted on 60 Minutes and had a limited run), but then reach was never the point. These assets evidenced the issue to media outlets and provided editors/writers with more content to use in their coverage. Call it media pollination in action.



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Impact

As word grew around Häagen-Dazs' involvement with CCD, media coverage poured in.

The PR goal: The initial PR goal of 125 million in 12 months was achieved in the first 7 days of the campaign.

The speed of the media pick-up was surprising. Testifying before Congress, one blueberry grower from Maine described public take-up of the issue: "I have never seen a problem in agriculture get more press and more consumer awareness in a shorter time than this"—Ed Flanagan, Wyman and Sons, 6.26.08

"HD loves HB" generated 277 million PR impressions, equivalent to about \$1.5 million. The story found its way onto everything—CNN, BBC, The New York Times—totaling 1,097 unique news placements in 2008. (Source: PR Agency)



More impact

Cash registers: A newly talked-about Häagen-Dazs reversed negative growth.

Revenue increased 7% vs. 2007—outpacing the growth target of 4%.

Unit volume was up 18% between April 2007 and April 2008.

By October 2008, Häagen-Dazs sales were at their highest in 5 years (Source: Häagen-Dazs)

“Mojo”: Häagen-Dazs brand advocacy jumped 13% between Q1 and Q2 2008 to 69% (the highest in the category—and now, for the first time, higher than Ben & Jerry’s).

Unintended consequences: The most important thing was the unintended thing.

Following two years of inaction over CCD, Congress suddenly moved to discuss further funding. Häagen-Dazs testified before the House Agriculture Subcommittee on June 26, 2008, and were told their efforts had been “extraordinary.” The House moved to increase funding.

In the meantime, “HD loves HB” is in its second year. Verbs seemed to revitalize a “nouny” brand. And new partnerships (inside and outside an ad agency) worked to add new life and, more importantly, to do some good.





So **please**, go tear up the deck,
plant bee-friendly flowers,
send a bee-mail and eat some ice cream.

The bees need all the help they can get. Thank you!