

Brita – Filter For Good

Summary

This is a story of how Brita changed water culture in America.

When bottled water became both a health and quasi fashion trend, Brita's sales dried up. The problem was not just one of perception though – Brita was a product for the home, and didn't have the portability people needed.

The answers did not come from the “normal” planning process because changing culture means going beyond what people can tell you. Instead what the agencies involved did was combine an interesting product truth that with the cultural trend of practical environmentalism to completely reposition Brita as a brand for a cleaner planet (not just better tasting water).

As with any cultural change, the solution was not just an communication led. It involved a product partnership with Nalgene that helped the brand overcome its product disadvantage, media partnerships with shows such as *The Biggest Loser*, PR programs, TV and newspaper.

The results were a complete business turnaround – a 21% increase in sales at the expense of bottled water's growth!

Challenge 1: How to change culture and benefit a brand (all at the same time)?

In the early 2000s bottled water went from being a restaurant-only product to a mass luxe invasion. Companies like Coke and Pepsi started investing upwards of \$50 MM per brand in advertising. Soon, a combination of marketing, distribution, bottle design and health had people drinking bottled water to the tune of 8.6 billion gallons a year. That's a lot of bottles!

All of this had dire effects on Brita's business. Not only were people not buying new Brita pitchers, but filter purchases by people who owned pitchers had dropped as well. Data confirmed that people were actually drinking more water – they had just switched to a more portable convenient option – bottled water. Brita was being left at home.

What could we do to change the culture of bottled water and overcome our product disadvantage?

Finding the answer...

In a “normal” planning process, we would each have probably started by doing research, developing a strategy, etc. But changing culture means going beyond what consumers can tell you. This was confirmed by the research we already had. It told us that Brita's main benefits of cleaner water and healthier habits weren't going to cut the mustard against bottled water.

What both agencies did instead, was combine a cultural truth with an unusual take on a product truth, then got right down to execution.

With the release of “An Inconvenient Truth,” growing Prius sales and the rise in gas prices, we were all very aware that practical sustainability - sustainability measures that didn't involve too much sacrifice - was on the rise. But the penny did not drop until a brand manager showed us a product research fact that she was thinking of using as a value message:

One Brita filters the same amount of water as 300 bottles of bottled water

What was important wasn't the water, it was the bottles. Suddenly, Brita was not just keeping drinking water clean; it was keeping the planet clean. We all immediately saw how Brita could become relevant again and de-position bottled water as both wasteful and damaging. We asked Brita to probe deeper on the facts and soon found that if Americans swapped just 10% of their water bottles for Brita water in a sustainable container, it would save nearly 12MM gallons of diesel fuel,

prevent more than 100MM pounds of greenhouses gases from entering the atmosphere and keep 213MM pounds of PET plastic out of our landfills.

In order to check that there was a group who would help us advocate this message, we checked the blogosphere and message boards to see what the conversation online was. It was clear that influencers who were environmentally conscious were beginning to see some of the same issues that we were. As one comment on Treehugger.com read:

“(There are) a world of reasons to ditch bottled water”

When soon after that, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom banned the city from buying bottle water (saving \$150,000 in the process); we had the proof we needed.

... Through execution

In spite of our confidence, our client had one major issue we had not solved. How would the strategy solve the fact that Brita could not be drunk outside of the home?

The PR agency then brought forward a brilliant product idea coupled that was also an online “issue” tool: a partnership with the Nalgene water bottle brand and a consumer website called FilterForGood.com, where consumers would go to take a pledge to stop drinking bottled water. To help them fulfill that pledge, Brita and Nalgene would send them a FilterForGood water bottle. Brita loved the idea so much that they expanded the partnership so that the Nalgene FilterForGood bottles were co-packed with Brita products at key retailers.

This idea was not just a solution to Brita’s out-of-home consumption problem, but a campaign idea that would do good for the world and the brand. Because the idea of taking a pledge is (potentially) inherently social, we created a Facebook application, supported by an advertising buy on the site. There was also a big PR and offline media push to support the site launch. Special displays were designed for in-store and a simple newspaper campaign was created to get the news out about how sustainable Brita was versus bottled water.

Underneath all of this activity was an important choice – the choice not to undertake research. It would have been easy to take the concept to focus groups or even try and gauge the idea quantitatively. However, the decision was made that the best learning would come from the marketplace. As results came in, we adjusted and added a new piece to the campaign.

Ramping it up

The campaign saw an almost immediate response from the press and sales. However, while site traffic was good it was not growing very fast. Up until this point the big mass media weapons in the arsenal (TV and broader web initiatives)

had not been used. They seemed to be the tools we needed to generate conversation and new news about Brita. But could/should they be used?

Challenge #2: Could we build a mass campaign around FilterForGood.com and avoid being seen as green washing or overly commercial?

The FilterFor Good.com site was unbranded, although it clearly linked to Brita.com. Could we build a mass-market campaign that would give Brita credit for its efforts yet not lose authenticity?

This time we did go back to our consumer by reviewing in-depth interviews we had conducted earlier that year.

Brita's most loyal customers had been dubbed Principled Filter Fans. Reviewing the interviews reminded us that these people were very conscious about where their lives were going and how they lived them. Importantly, when they do something positive in life, e.g. drink more water to stay healthy, it is both for themselves and those around them. They try to build community into the things they do socially, like creating clothing swap meets or volunteering at schools. But when they make changes, they only take small steps (even for big issues like health).

This told us a few things

1. Principled Filter Fans, with their social- and community-centric nature, would find the message relevant and could be very effective advocates.
2. The key was not to try and "sell" them a big idea – rather we had to show them how an everyday behavior could be changed very easily for big results (just like the changes they made in their life).

They were the right target for what we wanted.

All we had to do is ask them to take a small step and drink responsibly.

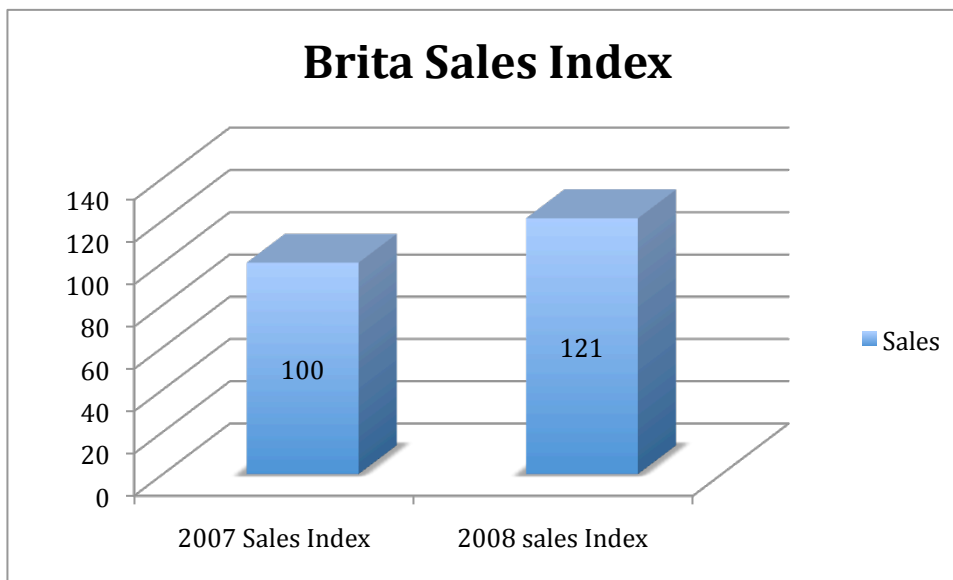
Our TV ads did just that – reminded them that their everyday use of bottled water that gave them a half hour or so of convenience, would last forever in a landfill, and we had a simple way they could give it up. We even brought this to life in the way we pitched directors for the TV production – sending them a special box with a plastic water bottle with copy that brought the insight to light.

PR activity and media partnerships continued to build out the idea. Josh Dorfman, *The Lazy Environmentalist*, became a spokesperson and content contributor for the campaign, counseling people on making small changes with big environmental impacts. Brita had a strong presence at The Sundance Film Festival to encourage people to go bottled water free. Brita also created a similar presence on NBC's "The Biggest Loser," a show that fit our brand strategy of helping create sustainable

change on a personal level. Not only did the show (very publicly) go bottled water free, but Brita was also completely integrated into the program content.

The Results: Overturning Bottled Water's Growth

In a year when product, spending and the competition had not changed, Brita's 2008 sales jumped a remarkable 21.6% vs. 2007. Further proof of advertising's role was provided by our client's rigorous econometric analysis, which showed advertising's contribution to sales of pitchers growing 70% since the campaign's launch. Perhaps most tellingly though, bottled water sales growth slowed dramatically from an average annual growth rate of 20% for the previous 5-6 years to 4.5%¹.



Traffic at FilterForGood.com reacted well to the advertising campaign, as well as the PR and media push, signing up 72,000 people to take the pledge. The campaign also captured attention from the press and blogosphere, obtaining 365 million media impressions (13 times the objective that Brita had set), allowing Brita to direct the conversation about water online and changing the culture of drinking bottled water.

¹ Source: Bottled Water Web Advisory Board

