



Bulmers Original Cider – a marketing case study 1996 to 2004

Introduction

Our current marketing strategy, begun in the late 1980's, has re-created Bulmers Original Cider as a market leader. In one of the most successful brand repositioning campaigns ever undertaken in the Irish Marketplace, one name completely altered consumer perceptions towards cider.

Late 1980's to 1996 – Bulmers faces a repositioning challenge

In the late 1980's, consumers developed a negative perception towards cider. It was seen as cheap and unsophisticated. The repositioning of the brand relied on a new creative message: *'Nothing Added But Time'*. This was a move away from traditional beer and cider advertising and as a consequence a new creative and media campaign had to appeal to and target 18-34 male audience. Developing this challenge became a long-term strategy.

Marketing Strategy - "A first class ticket"

Our aim from the start was to position Bulmers away from the competition. We would set it apart from other brands in the minds of the consumer. The best creative messages require a strong media campaign to change consumer perceptions. "A first class ticket" for Bulmers meant the best of everything: The best creative executions, the best production facilities and of course, the best media delivery and most innovative media solutions.

Bulmers operates in one of the most competitive markets in Ireland. The brand does not benefit from UK or European media overspill, which international beer brands selling in this country rely on. Consequently, we have had to fight the battle for market share as a twenty six county brand. The results speak for themselves, with huge growth in market share.



Key advertising objectives in repositioning

- Challenge the existing consumer perceptions of cider
- Address the need to communicate the Bulmers product values
- Reassure beer and lager consumers of the Bulmers product values and benefits

Key media objectives in repositioning

- Deliver the Bulmers message in as compelling and innovative a manner as possible
- Challenge consumer beliefs in cider advertising by constantly surprising consumers with the brands presence in unexpected media
- Develop a year-round advertising presence for the brand in order to help 'de-seasonalise' sales
- Create omnipresence in relevant media in order to achieve cut-through and recall

Using media in repositioning - "The best of everything"

Television

Television was chosen as the lead medium for the repositioning of Bulmers. The initial buying strategy was aimed at opinion leaders among TV viewers. Programmes such as 'The Late Late Show', 'Six One News' and 'Primetime' were selected among the type of shows where consumers would not expect to see a Bulmers advertisement. Hence, this type of programming was important to the brand.

Bulmers made a heavy investment in ensuring that the "first class ticket" that the brand aspired to included the kind of people who we wanted to see these commercials. Our expenditure on television has consistently seen the brand in the top three beer



spenders. As the brand is twenty six county only, our presence across RTE has been very strong.

In more recent times the brand has become a major player on all Irish TV stations - TV3, TG4, Sky and E4. Again, as Bulmers does not benefit from overspill TV activity – UTV, Channel 4, MTV, Sky Sports, etc. it relies solely on utilising indigenous Irish media sources.

Throughout the repositioning period the TV strategy developed into two distinct streams: First, the ‘corporate’ campaigns targeted premium programming across all main stations. High ratings and strong coverage coupled with high impact, emotive commercials have embedded the Bulmers values of tradition, respect and nature with an entire generation.

Secondary to the strategy have been sporting programmes. Bulmers identified several key sports, which would fit the brand’s new persona – golf, soccer, GAA and rugby. (Golf and rugby being particularly important when the age and social profile of typical consumers is taken into consideration.)

Bulmers developed special TV executions, which related specifically to these sporting events. With an aggressive media strategy for targeting these programmes, the Bulmers advertising message became much more relevant in the eyes of consumers.

Press

Press played an extremely important role in the initial repositioning of Bulmers and is now a continuous presence via sponsorship activity.

As with television, press was initially used in order to position Bulmers where you would least expect to find it. *The Irish Times*, *Phoenix Magazine* and *The Sunday Tribune* were all part of the mix challenging consumer perceptions of where a cider should traditionally have been advertised.



The press strategy evolved in tandem with the Bulmers sports strategy. The Arena sports supplement in *The Irish Examiner* was completely branded by Bulmers. A series of 'Vintage Sporting Greats' was run in *The Title* newspaper (now *Ireland on Sunday*) highlighting sporting heroes who also showed dedication and originality in their pursuit of a goal. Bulmers was also the first brand to use specially commissioned sports pages in *The Sunday Tribune* as well as a continuous presence on football pages in *The Star* newspaper.

Media

Outdoor

Since it was first repositioned as a brand, Bulmers has adopted a strategy of innovation across certain media. Initially outdoor was chosen as it was relatively under-represented by beer brands. Bulmers chose to extend the medium through 48 sheet, 6 sheet and transport formats. Later, as the format became busier radio was chosen as an appropriate medium.

Radio

The radio strategy included both a presence on national and local stations to give the brand a strong presence across the medium. In 1996 Bulmers entered into an association with the then named Radio Ireland to create the 'Bulmers Saturday' sports show. This was the first radio show in Ireland to bring live coverage of Premiership football matches. Promotion for this venture saw a strong below the line campaign in 'style' pubs throughout Ireland. Special football programmes were developed by Bulmers and given away on big match nights. The promotion was also supported with drip mats in selected outlets. As the station evolved into Today fm so to did the format of the show, leading to extremely high weekend listenership for the station. Bulmers now sponsor all sports news giving the brand a continuous daily presence on the station.



Cinema

The use of cinema has also played an important role in the Bulmers communication mix. An ongoing strategy aimed at ensuring the brand's dominance of the medium has been in place since 1997.

Specialist Activity

Innovation has always played a strong role in the development of the Bulmers marketing platform. In an increasingly competitive marketplace the onus is on the advertiser to ensure that their brand is perceived in a unique and distinctive manner.

Bulmers have stepped outside the boundaries imposed by more traditional media options:

- Special Outdoor signage in Donnybrook and Amiens Street (Dublin) and Patrick's Street (Cork)
- Sponsorship of the Cork opera house
- Special Christmas 48 Sheet poster with working lights – now an integral part of the Christmas environment
- Official sponsor of Today fm 2002 World Cup updates from Japan
- Official sponsor of the Golfing Union of Ireland (GUI)
- Sponsorship of Cork Constitution rugby team

Repositioning pays off

In 1996 Bulmers Cider was awarded gold in the IAPI Advertising Effectiveness Awards, long-term campaign. Market share was increased by 4% between 1990 and 1996.



Keeping the brand moving - 1997 to 2000

Building on a successful formula can sometimes be more difficult than re-inventing or launching a brand. We knew that the advertising communication was working but also that we mustn't get complacent. Qualitative research undertaken by the Research Centre in early 1997 identified the following points:

- Bulmers appears to be in a good state of health; all vital organs are functioning well
- Perception of product values, brand imagery and user profile are all moving in the right direction
- Advertising is seen by consumers to have played a major part and they are prepared to go along with it
- The key now is to push harder rather than stand back
- A shift in a different direction or standing still would not be advisable
- Consumers are demanding more from the brand - not less

The competition gets wise

After altering public perceptions of the marketplace as a whole, Bulmers had to adapt to survive in a new environment. Ironically, it was largely one of our own making. New factors now had to be considered going forward, such as stronger competitive forces at work.

'Alco-pops' were creating headlines and capturing younger consumers. Guinness had just launched Hudson Blue Cider as a direct competitor - one with a significant advertising budget behind it.

These developments together with on-going competition from stout, lager and ale meant that the strategic position we adopted must protect current market share while seeking to strengthen the Bulmers brand over the next four years.



Building on a successful creative strategy

Up to 1996, we had successfully created the orchard and vats as icons for the brand. Were we to abandon them or retain them in some form? Both we, and our advertising agency were aware that the brand had to move on and that a reworking of existing themes would not suffice. Exhaustive creative exploration began, which led to the development of a new parallel strategy. This would communicate the core brand values in an innovative way.

Parallel 1: Television and cinema

These would depict images other than the now famous orchard and vat, adding another significant layer to the brand.

Parallel 2: Outdoor, press, and radio

These media would retain the iconic images but convey them in a new creative sphere.

Success in evolution

By building on the strengths that emerged after the initial repositioning of the late 1980's and early 1990's, we helped Bulmers grow. After a further period of long-term commercial success with the brand, four years after winning our first gold we felt it was appropriate to re-enter Bulmers in the IAPI awards, where again, we were awarded gold.

The future

The intention of any Bulmers media activity is to reach our target 18-34 audience in a distinctive and relevant manner. The beer and cider market in Ireland is still extremely busy and competitive. As a result advertising cut-through is essential in order for the Bulmers brand to stand out. New and innovative media solutions are constantly being included in the media mix in order to keep reinforcing the core messages of the brand.



Bulmers Cider has shown considerable growth within the cider market but most importantly within the beer category. Market share of this category has doubled over the 6 years up to 2002 and two years later shows no sign of slowing down. In the future, Bulmers Original Cider will continue to maintain its position as a major marketing entity in Ireland.

Why did Bulmers succeed?

“Extending the Bulmers brand franchise beyond it’s core consumer base and changing consumer perceptions as well as exposing the brand to a broader consuming public has been achieved through strategic marketing and media planning and placement” – Stephen Kent: Marketing Manager (Ciders) Bulmers Ltd.