A CASE STUDY FROM
PR NEWS

BRAND AWARENESS

HOW A CAT LITTER USED EMOTION TO CHANGE ITS UNDERDOG BRAND STATUS

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World's Best Cat Litter, a Kent Pet Group brand, is a premium, natural litter that lets consumers use less and get more, thanks to the concentrated power of corn. While the line of litters had grown to lead the natural-litter category since its launch in the late 1990s, in 2015 the brand sought to break through to a mass category audience and raise awareness among cat owners across the nation.

In addition to further increasing sales and awareness, World's Best Cat Litter looked to generate word of mouth and create a story that ensured its consumers were willing to choose its product based on overall performance, rather than price per pound. With more and more shoppers looking for total-value solutions, the brand needed to prove its value beyond price.

HURDLES

With dozens of litters all promising the same thing—odor control, easy cleanup, etc.—and often promising it at a lower cost, World's Best Cat Litter had to rise above the noise in the feature and functionality war and capture audience attention with a smaller budget and more disruption.

The brand needed to validate its price point, while also becoming part of the conversation among cat owners. And it needed to get noticed in-store, where many packaged-goods consumers still make their final decision. To do so, it needed to create a disruptive campaign and efficient media buy.

STRATEGY

To grab consumer attention in the crowded pet-product marketplace, World's Best Cat Litter knew it needed to create an emotional story that resonated with its cat-loving audience. The brand sought to create emotional branding that linked performance to the positive cat-owner relationship-boosting benefits of picking the right litter.

Through internal and secondary research, World's Best Cat Litter learned that consumers are willing to spend more for quality products. While the research showed the most important pain points of litter purchasers are odor control, easy cleanup and performance, the brand needed to wrap these drivers into a

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total-value story surrounding its long-lasting performance.

To tie together the performance of the litter with consumers' love for their cats, the brand messaged the over-arching emotional value of using the product: the ability to think about one's cat, not the litter box.

Knowing that disruptive imagery was needed to demonstrate this idea, visuals literally put cats on people's heads. The placement and color of the cats' fur made it appear as though they were part of the person's hair, adding to the unexpected element of the campaign.

The cat heads were paired with a unifying message that used multiple executions to message how this product is capable of allowing people to use less litter while delivering the benefits most important to purchasers.

The campaign launched in 2015 with an "It's Just Litter Until..." headline to educate consumers about why litter choice matters (e.g. It's Just Litter Until Buying More Is Always On Your Mind).

World's Best Cat Litter utilized primary and secondary research to narrow its focus and understand the psychographics/buying behaviors of the audience most likely to drive awareness and growth of the brand.

The brand took research insights to craft messaging and visuals that would appeal to the top drivers of litter purchasers, but also disrupt in a crowded space. This included working with multiple teams to jointly craft messaging and visuals.

World's Best Cat Litter looked for the most focused and efficient means of reaching likely buyers where they live, work and play. The campaign focused on maximizing exposure and engagement.

With a limited budget, the brand needed to create an efficient media buy and focus on geographic areas with the most efficient conversion. After establishing the campaign's creative focus, messaging and imagery, the brand set out to launch the campaign across print, digital and social media, as well as through in-store and outdoor advertising.

The brand targeted digital and experiential buys in key metro areas that attracted the type of cat owner buying premium pet products. This included a 30-second "cat head" commercial on Hulu, focused on adults 25-54 watching comedy and dramas; placing radio spots; and running regional print ads in major audience-appropriate magazines.

Out-of-home ads on LCD screens in commuter hotspots helped the brand reach millions of in-city and pass-through commuters during "dwell time." Other out-of-home efforts included experiential manifestations of the campaign at cat-loving events such as CatCon Los Angeles in June 2016.

In addition to these geo-focused efforts, ads were placed in national publications targeted at pet owners, and the team ran highly targeted social media ads.

RESULTS

World's Best Cat Litter measured the impact of its campaign through brand awareness surveys, sales numbers, website traffic, digital ad performance and increases in its social following and email list.

The campaign was adjusted in real-time using A/B testing to identify ads most likely to drive action.

Based on national brand awareness surveys conducted in early 2016 and 2017, awareness is up 5.5%. Meanwhile, sales increased 18.3% from 2015 to 2016, and an estimated 7% from 2016 to 2017 (by pounds of litter sold).

In terms of digital, the brand's email database grew 7% from 2015 to 2016 and the brand saw a 67% leap in blog subscribers from 2015 to 2016. The Facebook fan base grew nearly 11% from 2015 to 2016. Website traffic also rose, especially in geographic target zones, including a 25.8% rise in D.C. traffic from Q2 to Q3 of 2015. Most recently, blog traffic increased 18% year over year from 2016 to 2017.

In 2017, demand for the product has resulted in the company building a new factory.

LESSONS LEARNED

KEEP IT SIMPLE. Can your story be explained in a matter of seconds? If not, try again.

KNOW YOUR TARGET. Focus the message on what really matters to your audience. Get in your customer's shoes.

PROVIDE HELP. Customers don't care what your product can do; they care about what it can do for them. List your brand's benefits, not its features.

REPOSITION YOUR COMPETITION. Trying your brand for the first time is a leap of faith for the consumer. Create value by stating your number-one market differentiator.

GET EMOTIONAL. Great brands become great because their customers have become emotionally attached. Consumers buy brands, not products. Tie your product with its emotional impact on a consumer and you'll create a positive association that will last for years.

Editor's Note: This case study first appeared in PRNEWS in October 2017.