

Carpedia assists UNB with a Brand Revitalization Strategy



We have just completed a strategy assignment for United National Breweries, South Africa's largest producer of traditional African beer, who were keen to upgrade their brands in an effort to attract more consumers to their brands.

The Setting

United National Breweries is a subsidiary of the UB Group in India, and South Africa's only producer of traditional African beer, also referred to as sorghum beer. The product's history goes back to the previous century when a German brewer created a commercial process for producing sorghum beer in Botswana. In the 1960's the South African Government expanded sorghum beer production by setting up sorghum breweries in the townships and catered to consumers' needs in purpose built beer halls. In 1995, with the Mandela Government coming into power, a consolidation followed under a company named National Sorghum Breweries, which ran into financial difficulties, and was acquired by the UB Group of India.

Mr S.P. Chaudhary, UNB's COO, was interested in growing sorghum beer sales in South Africa, and one area of improvement was to upgrade the image of sorghum beer, thus far seen as a poor man's drink with consumers largely from the bottom of the LSM pyramid. Compounding the problem was the plethora of different brands sold in different areas of the country, resulted in UNB having to support no less than 11 different brands.

Mr. Chaudhary brought Carpedia in to assist in defining a new direction that UNB could take in terms of brand image. The brief was simple; Review our brands, and provide us with some alternative strategies that will reinforce the brands and the image of the product in the market, so that we can expand the current consumer base. This is how the process unfolded:



The Situation

After conducting a basic review of UNB's marketing operations which included their product, packaging and brand strategies, Carpedia presented the following findings:

- UNB was seriously sales focused, while marketing activities were confined to an annual promotional calendar and some ad hoc promotional efforts on a regional basis.

- There was no classic marketing function in the company, to the extent that basic marketing functions like product management, promotions management, brand management, above the line advertising and below the line marketing promotions were totally absent.
- The thinking at top team level was in fact sales volume directed, with little or no understanding of how demand was driven by marketing processes.
- The importance of brand was under-played and the role of price was over played. Thinking was directed into concepts like “ how can I make the product even cheaper, so that we can drop the price even further, and thus improve sales”
- Any changes to the brand presentation and or packaging were feared, as the belief that consumers would respond negatively to any changes to the packaging and the brands was a widely held belief.
- In fact, the packaging and by implication the brand designs were left untouched since 1970! It was inconceivable that the brand images were left unchanged for 38 years!

➤ While change was certainly required, the challenge facing Carpedia was all about dragging the product range into the 21st century, in the absence of formal marketing thinking.

The Complication

Faced with a predominantly hostile audience in terms of Top Team thinking, Carpedia knew that “wholesale change” was going to be out of the question. There was just too much to deal with terms of the marketing basics, and the “ chasm” between the As-Is positional reality and where UNB needed to be in terms of moving towards a more focused needs focused marketing effort was just too great. It was like trying to get paraplegics to compete in an Iron Man event.

Carpedia did however work closely with the COO, in terms of recommendations to create a platform for putting the basic building blocks to a classic marketing approach in place. The COO however insisted that Carpedia come up with some conceptual ideas of how the brand and packaging could be changed in order to “open the minds” of the top team in terms of what was possible.

A typical Sorghum Beer Consumer drinking from a carton



Consumer Profile

85 % Men 15 % Women
 Black & small % coloured
 Aged 35-80
 Low income LSM 1-4
 1,060,000 at last count
 High % Rural
 Smaller % Urban
 High % Traditionalist
 High % Pensioner / unemployed
 High degree of Brand loyalty

The Solution

Carpedia's recommendations were as follows:

- For UNB to continue with a strong sales improvement focus, finding ways to sell more products into new markets (geographies) in order to keep sales growth alive. It was important to keep the evidence that growth was in fact possible, alive
- For UNB to hire a marketing graduate to enter the business at executive level, in order to establish some semblance of marketing know-how in the company
- For UNB to conduct formal market research on the following basis:
 - to explore the current consumer identity
 - to explore the current consumer attitudes to the current product range
 - to explore the potential for attracting higher level LSM's to consume the **current product range**
 - to explore the higher level LSM's expectations of the product, packaging, taste profile and branding that would attract them to consuming the product.

➤ Carpedia further developed scenarios of what was possible, should UNB be in a position to revitalize product, brands and packaging concepts, that could help them access new consumer groups.

Branding and Packaging Concepts

Current Reality- Ijuba “Red” and Ijuba “Blue” and “Leopard Special” packaging presentation

Words that described the current brand and packaging concepts:

- Tired
- Washed out
- Rudimentary
- Uninspiring
- Basic



Concepts to improve the Brand presentation on the current packaging format



Words that described the upgraded brand and packaging concepts:

- Fresh
- Dynamic & strong
- Different – outstanding
- Sleek
- Clean lines

While the above attempts are by no means the final result, the designers were instructed to “upgrade” look and feel, rather than make a drastic departure from the status quo.

Concepts to develop a fresh brand category-improved packaging

A further concept was pursued in terms of “taking the concept all the way into the future” with changes to the brand, the packaging and the type of beer produced. In this case, UNB’s product developer came up with a type of sorghum beer, which was “fermentation halted” and flavoured in “Ginger”, “Malt” and “Tropical”, and was packed in 450ml cans. This was described a radical departure from the status quo

Conceptually, UNB were now able to extend the product range, create more dynamism behind the brand, with the “Black Leopard” brand concept, improve the consumers choice in terms of flavor availability as well as enhance the consumers experience, in terms of drinking from can, rather than a soggy carton. While this product may not have appealed to current consumer groups, it was clear that higher level LSM’s would have perceived the product as a definitive departure from the old, and a welcome addition to the range.



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