

Resuscitation Marketing

Breathing New Life into Suffocating Brands & Categories

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While venture capital money is propagating dot.coms by the dozen, some of America's most respected companies and brands — Coca-Cola, Kellogg, Nike, Levi's — are in serious need of marketing CPR.

The marketing virus, which sometimes extends to entire categories, such as cold cereals, coffee or canned foods, usually afflicts highly mature brands. It's as though huge market share and continually growing margins actually weaken the company or brand, creating a fertile ground for disease.

This was clearly true for the milk business in the early 1990s. Despite decades of "Good for You" advertising, milk consumption was disappearing down the marketing drain. The competition was staggering: soft drinks, bottled water, sport beverages, juice drinks and an entirely new category called "New Age Beverages."

Spending behind milk was extremely low, the basic package hadn't changed for decades, and product innovation amounted to chocolate milk.

Additionally, milk's image was almost virginally pure and incredibly boring. Here was a category with 90% household penetration and a retail value of over \$20 billion. And it was steadily atrophying, in dire need of resuscitation.

Got Milk? and the Milk Mustache program were the catalysts for this resurrection. While Milk Mustache print and publicity helped reinforce the nutritional value of milk, the Got Milk? program shocked the beverage

back to consciousness.

Constructed on a milk-deprivation strategy, Got Milk? injected humor and currency into milk. Created by the ad agency Goodby, Silverstein & Partners (San Francisco), the campaign leveraged an array of incredibly powerful food partners: Nabisco, Nestle, General Mills, Kellogg, Quaker Oats, Keebler, Cookie Monster and the Girl Scouts.

The ads took hold, and led to an e-commerce site, a book and a licensing program.

Licensing played a vital role in milk's revival. The two big moments came only weeks apart in 1995. The first was a call from the National Milk Board [creators of the Milk Mustache campaign], asking if we would consider licensing the Got Milk? advertising campaign, which placed Got Milk? on network TV and in virtually every household in the US.

The second call was from Mattel, seeking to produce a co-branded Barbie product. Mattel asked if they could rename their upcoming "Cookies & Milk Barbie" to "Got Milk? Barbie."

With these two strokes, Got Milk? as a property was born.

Got Milk? now has over 90% awareness nationally and is supported by about \$180 million in marketing funds. While we aren't going to put Coca-Cola out of business, the dairy industry has clearly brought milk back to life. •

