OLD SPICE
A Case Study in Using Social Media as Part of a Rebranding Communication Strategy

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What is Brand Image?

You encounter numerous brands in your daily life. You wake up and turn off the alarm on your iPhone. You make eggs and toast bread from Trader Joe’s. You drive to work in your Toyota, while listening to Spotify.

All of these brands leave a lasting impression on you, regardless of whether or not you are conscious of it. This impression, or perception, is known as brand image. Your brain automatically associates a brand with a specific logo, color, quality, or service. Essentially, a brand is a promise.¹

A company’s brand image is crucial to its success, as it fully affects consumers’ buying decisions. At first, consumers may choose a brand based on basic factors like quality and price. Eventually, when the brand is successfully established, consumers are not simply buying the product. Instead, by choosing a particular brand, they are agreeing with the values behind the brand. They are embracing a certain lifestyle. These consumers are willing to pay more for a product because of that kind of emotional connection.

Similarly, brand image can also negatively influence a company. If consumers lose trust or interest in a certain brand, it would be very difficult for the company to market their products. For example, after years of success, male grooming product brand Old Spice began to suffer from an outdated brand image, which led to a large decline in sales. However, in 2010, the company completely rebranded itself largely by altering the communication channels used with its customers. Old Spice is now the leading male body wash and deodorant brand in the United States. This case is offered as an example of an effective way to re-brand a firm using social media.

Old Spice’s Loss of Market Share

After 70 years of long-term success, Old Spice began to steadily lose sales in the male body wash market. Up until the new millennium, the brand had successfully promoted its products by focusing on the mature male as its target market. For example, in the 1970’s, advertisements used women as a way to promote the product. One print ad showed two women holding Old Spice aftershave bottles in the middle of a forest: one with an “American” appearance and the other with an “exotic” look. The caption read “A Most Civilized Shave, An Uncivilized Fragrance.”²

Other advertisements portrayed women embracing a studly male, with the bottle in the bottom corner. In addition to using sex to sell the product, the brand emphasized how the aftershave was for young, classy girls’ fathers. One tagline read “Because my Heart Belongs to Daddy,” depicting a young girl holding the bottle and sitting in a fancy armchair. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, similar advertisements were published. While Old Spice had created a niche for itself as a product for older men, the company realized it needed to evolve if it wanted to remain competitive.³
Initial Rebranding Efforts

In the 1990s, Procter & Gamble (P&G) bought the company and tried to change the brand in order to target younger individuals. The brand’s content changed, but the media channels used remained the same. This proved to be problematic because as trends, culture and media advanced over the past two decades, the brand was no longer thought to be contemporary. Old Spice continued to use traditional media outlets, such as television and print advertisements.

Despite the brand’s first major attempt to rebrand itself, its competitor Axe was slowly edging it out of the millennial market. In response, Old Spice launched the “Swagger” campaign that same year.

The “Swagger” Campaign in 2008 marked the first time that Old Spice successfully began to target a younger demographic; the name was chosen because of its “cultural currency and attitude.” Advertising agency Wieden and Kennedy (W&K) helped launch the new campaign, transforming the face of the brand. The campaign targeted men between the ages of 12 and 34 using such social media platforms as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube in order to reach younger generations. This first step in the right direction augmented sales by more than 400%.

How Did Old Spice Successfully Rebrand Itself?

In 2010, Old Spice ultimately rebranded itself by changing their customer experience on social media. The brand’s campaign generated tens of millions of online views and quickly became a viral sensation from video production and television commercials. The wild success of Old Spice’s campaign resulted from three main factors: targeting, execution, and the brand’s communications strategy. In terms of communication, a clever ad and smart use of social media produced a fresh, youthful identity that revitalized Old Spice’s brand and boosted sales.

In order to revitalize the brand, P&G knew they had to reposition Old Spice to a younger market. It is important to note that Old Spice did not stray away from its heritage; instead, it capitalized on its reputation as a “manly man” brand and simply modernized the messaging in order to appeal to a new market.

With its positive outcome, the example of Old Spice’s actual success lies in its “The Man Your Man Could Smell Like” campaign.

“The Man Your Man Could Smell Like” Campaign

In 2010, Old Spice hired Wieden and Kennedy (W&K) to come up with a new campaign. Craig Allen and Eric Kallman of W&K, who wrote the primary 30-second spot and the shorter 15-second companion piece, designed the entire campaign.

Traditionally, men’s body wash and deodorant companies sole targeted men for obvious reasons. After finding that 60% of men’s body washes were actually purchased by women, the company realized that it had to broaden its target market. If they wanted to increase Old Spice sales, they
had to convince females to buy Old Spice for their men. The company also knew that they had to do more than just generate awareness of the Old Spice brand. They needed to engage with its audiences and create conversation.

In 2010, the brand launched its “The Man Your Man Could Smell Like” campaign featuring former NFL player Isaiah Mustafa. The campaign debuted with an outlandish video posted on YouTube during Super Bowl weekend. The brand kept its masculine image that it was long associated with but “replaced the serious, burly persona with an over exaggerated, humorous version of the egotistical male façade.” Mustafa acted as a “crusader against ‘lady-scented’ body wash” with his suave and charismatic ways appealing to both men and women. In addition, his “look at your man, now back to me” dialogue practically forced a conversation between women and their men.

The dialogue in the advertisement goes like this:

Hello, ladies, look at your man, now back to me, now back at your man, now back to me. Sadly, he isn’t me, but if he stopped using ladies scented body wash and switched to Old Spice, he could smell like he’s me. Look down, back up, where are you? You’re on a boat with the man your man could smell like. What’s in your hand, back at me. I have it, it’s an oyster with two tickets to that thing you love. Look again, the tickets are now diamonds. Anything is possible when your man smells like Old Spice and not a lady. I’m on a horse.

The ad became a viral sensation overnight, and its targeted messaging apparently worked - women went out and bought the body wash. Immediately following the campaign, sales were up 40% according to P&G’s 2010 annual report. Instead of turning women into sex objects like its competitor Axe does, Old Spice included them in its target audience.

The company then abandoned its usual media placements that were targeted towards young men, and instead focused on media that men and women were more likely to watch together. This included television shows like Lost and American Idol, in addition to commercial advertisements before movies during Valentine’s Day weekend.
As a continuation of the advertisement, the company launched the “Response” campaign in July 2010. Consumers and fans were encouraged to ask Mustafa questions via Twitter, which he would answer in real time with short YouTube videos. In three days, Old Spice posted 186 personalized video responses, which resulted in 40 million YouTube views and an 800% increase in fan interaction. The real time nature of these videos became huge online and drove “millions of views of essentially what are branded ads and spreading the creative of the TV spots to a much wider audience online.”

Campaign Results

“The Man Your Man Could Smell Like” campaign generated unprecedented results for Old Spice and quickly became a cultural phenomenon and Old Spice’s popularity was boosted. In terms of social media, the following data show the increasing popularity caused by the commercials:

- Nearly 105 million YouTube views of the campaign
- 1.2 billion earned media impressions, including features on national broadcast networks and international media outlets
- 2700% increase in Twitter followers
- 800% increase in Facebook fan interaction
- 300% increase in traffic to Old Spice’s main website
- Old Spice became the No.1 Most Viewed Sponsored YouTube Channel

The success and influence of a social media campaign is captured by word of mouth and by people sharing videos or links to their friends. The campaign not only resonated with younger generations, but also received the following from experts around the world:

- Grand Prix For Film at the Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival, June 2010
- Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Commercial, July 2010

On July 16, Old Spice had eight of the top 11 most popular videos on YouTube.

Ultimately, Old Spice began the campaign in the hopes that it would revitalize its business operations. From research gathered, increase in sales from the campaign is summarized below. The following data was recorded around June 2010, about four months after the campaign launched in February 2010:

- Within the last 12 months, body wash sales increased by 11%
- Within the last 6 months, body wash sales increased by 27%
- Within the last 3 months, body wash sales increased by 55%
- Within the last month, body wash sales increased by 107%

Figure 1 showcases sales and market shares data collected in 2010.

P&G owned brands such as Old Spice and Gillette clearly rose substantially in sales compared with other brands like Nivea, Dove and AXE.

**Generalized Rebranding Strategies**

The strategy that Old Spice used can be generalized as “Make the Old New Again.” Any brand can become irrelevant over time. Companies should constantly engage with their audiences and rekindle people’s impression on purchasing the companies’ products.

Many companies associate rebranding with altering their management or product offering. However, the example of Old Spice demonstrates that companies can enjoy better brand awareness by using the appropriate communication channels. Knowing the appropriate channels comes from knowing the appropriate audiences to target. Specifically, by “building on the brand’s established values and updating them” through social media channels, older companies can successfully engage with a wider audience. Such a viral rebranding campaign was only possible with the help of social media, where people naturally share information that they find entertaining.

**Discussion Questions**

What are the most pertinent questions that should be asked in order to address the critical issues, main decisions and possible solutions to this case?