

Grow your brand: from source to communications

Sue Burden, Added Value, maps out and illustrates the key steps in developing a brand growth strategy

FIRST, IT IS IMPORTANT to distinguish between short-term sales uplift and long-lasting brand growth – genuine brand growth will usually involve some development in key brand metrics (for example, a change or strengthening in perceived brand image or personality) rather than a short-term sales response that will be very useful, but will not usually leave a long-term effect on the brand.

Serious brand growth demands rigorous research, detailed planning and a relentless focus of activity. Basically, there are three main stages to this.

Stage one: brand growth – the source

Just doing more of the same activities as the brand has done in the past is unlikely to deliver a noticeable level of growth, and could well cost the brand more than it needs to spend. Deciding on the source of sustainable growth for the brand is a critical decision, requiring imaginative thinking and a thorough examination of all available brand metrics.

The key decision is whether the majority of growth will come from:

- ▶ new buyers who have not used the brand in the past, or
- ▶ existing buyers buying or using more frequently or in greater quantities (usually the first-choice option, as it is much less

costly to develop an existing customer) (see Figure 1).

The main metric for this decision is usually the brand's incidence or penetration – the proportion of the population who currently consume the product. Deciding whether the brand's incidence has room for growth, or is already at saturation, will relate to levels of the population who have a theoretical need for the brand and the incidence that has been achieved by relevant competitive brands. If incidence is already at or near saturation – everyone who would be likely to consume the brand is already consuming it – then growth would have to come from encouraging more frequent consumption, or in the case of a durable, a shorter replacement cycle.

In reality, growth may come from a combination of increased quantities and increased frequency; however, focus on one area or the other is more likely to achieve success.

Stage two: brand growth – the strategy

The key components for the Brand Growth Strategy will come from defining:

- ▶ who is the target market who will consume more of the brand?
- ▶ in what way will these people consume more?

- ▶ does the brand need short or long-term growth?

Who has the motive and the opportunity to commit the deed? In your search for defining what will trigger growth, as for a detective starting a murder enquiry, rule number one is to rule nothing out. Make a rigorous search of all brand data and research available, looking for any clues that could indicate a path to increased consumption. This could come from a variety of sources.

- ▶ Brand tracking will show which brand image attributes coincided with growth (or were barriers to growth) in any of the brands tracked.

- ▶ Previous new product development projects may have highlighted possible routes to brand growth via new launches/brand extensions.

- ▶ A brand usage and attitude study should list all the brand touchpoints and occasions where the brand is consumed (or its service points) – which are the biggest and/or in growth? This study should also show what other products the consumer is using to fulfil the need your brand answers – maybe your brand could seek to replace them?

- ▶ Market mapping will indicate which consumer segments have unmet needs or would be most likely to appreciate the benefits your brand has to offer.

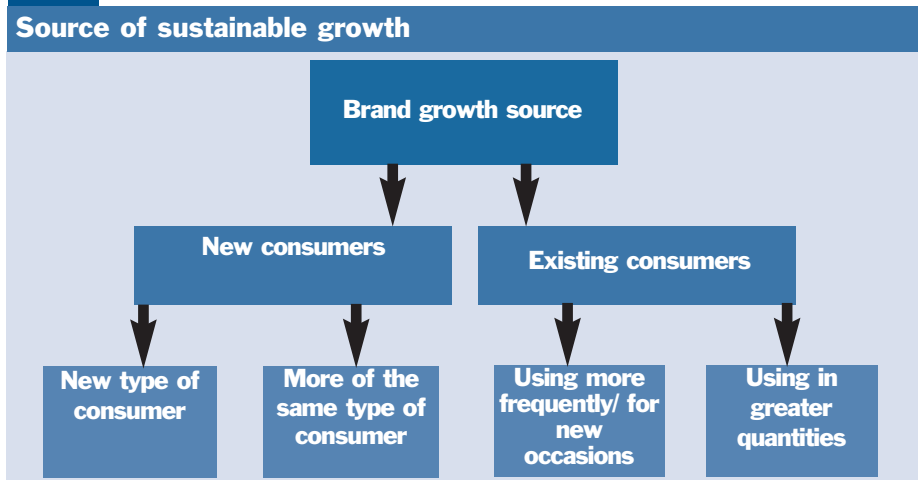
- ▶ Trend studies will indicate underlying consumer behaviours at a macro level that could be exploited by the brand.

- ▶ How does the user profile of your brand compare to those of the competition? Which demographic groups are consuming the most or more frequently?

This wide-ranging review could well yield numerous ideas for ways to achieve brand growth; in addition, carry out a brainstorming workshop to explore every way consumers use or access your brand.

Fmcg confectionery brands have increased their usage occasions by launching packaging that can be easily operated with one hand – for example TicTac packs. This puts them into all usage occasions where consumers only

FIGURE 1



Sue Burden is a Director in the Added Value UK office. She is an experienced quantitative and qualitative practitioner and speaks regularly at industry conferences.



have one hand available for eating – maybe they're out shopping carrying a bag. Other confectionery brands have moved to bigger bags in grocery to grow the brand by increasing their share of in-home consumption – opening the brand to more usage occasions and potentially new users.

For a service brand, equivalent examples could be going online (like Direct Line insurance), or changing access hours (as pubs have done), or changing what's on offer – maybe a stripped-down economy version (such as low-cost airline BMI Baby) would appeal to a new audience.

In the durable area, a brand growth strategy to position a car for a different age group is often communicated by featuring the new age group in the advertising and tapping into the target group's iconography. To appeal to an older age group, Ford in the USA digitally inserted modern cars into vintage film milieus alongside 'grey icons' Steve McQueen and Dennis Hopper.

The shortlist of potential brand growth strategies could include:

- ▶ advertising or promotion designed to increase a brand's image rating in the specific area that the brand tracking has shown to be correlated with brand growth
- ▶ new packaging to prompt new usage occasions and attract new users
- ▶ focusing on a specific target audience – either a part of the existing audience that shows signs of growth or a new group outside the existing target
- ▶ focus on a new sales channel reaching new consumers
- ▶ shortening the durable purchase cycle by launching a special edition linked to a time-bound event
- ▶ introducing new brand extensions that grow the brand footprint.

The brand growth strategy shortlist will then need to be evaluated: the evaluation process would have to consider the effect on existing brand consumption, as well as feasibility, cost, the projected level of growth that could be achieved, whether there is any real evidence of the strategy's likelihood of success and whether the strategy will deliver genuine brand growth, as opposed to short-term

sales without long-term effect. In making this assessment, previous growth achieved by the brand and growth achieved by competitive brands in the same sector will be the most useful benchmarks. Clearly, it would normally be very optimistic to project a level of growth for the brand that no other brand in the sector has ever achieved.

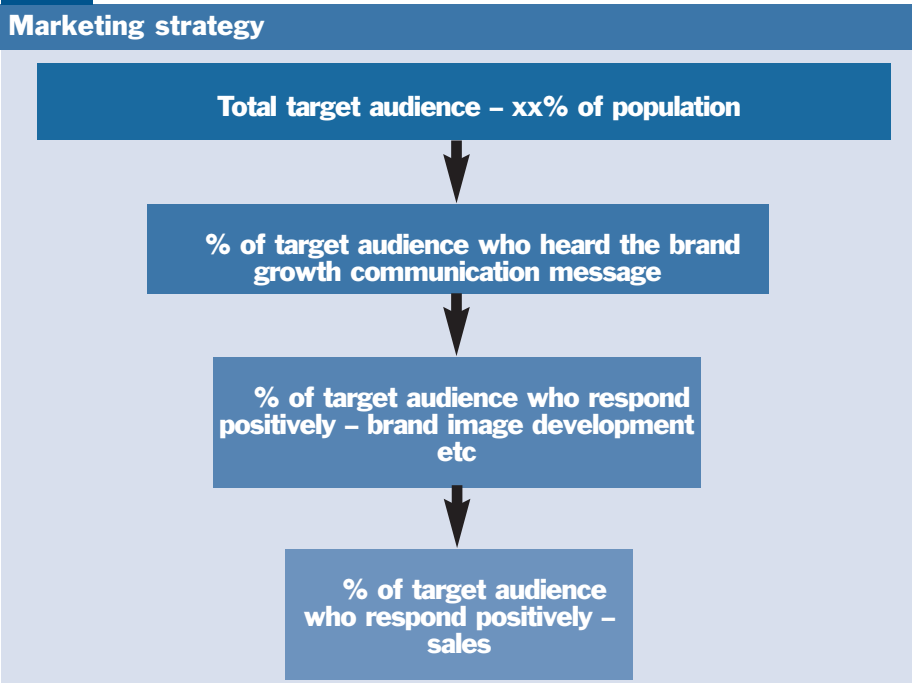
Once you've decided on a brand growth strategy, constructing a simple marketing model of how the strategy is meant to work (see Fig 2) will enable you to relate the strategy to target growth levels, for example, if the source of brand growth is defined as existing consumers using the brand more frequently, apply the expected increased consumption to the anticipated proportion of existing consumers who will respond to the brand's suggestion to use the brand more frequently (see Figure 3). The more consumers respond, the less extra each one will have to consume to achieve the same level of growth. This is where the dimension of communication to achieve brand growth comes in – maximising the level of consumers who will respond to the brand's suggestion will depend on the extent and efficiency of the brand's communication behind the brand growth strategy.

Stage three: communication

Communication for brand growth should follow logically from the definition of the brand growth source and the brand growth strategy. As with the brand strategy itself, more of the same is unlikely to be as successful as using the brand growth initiative to signal change, perhaps by using different media more appropriate to the brand growth strategy. Even if the main medium remains the same, secondary media can be varied, to communicate clearly that the brand is on the move. New media will not only signal a new message, but the media often offer increased discounts to new brands using the medium as a test.

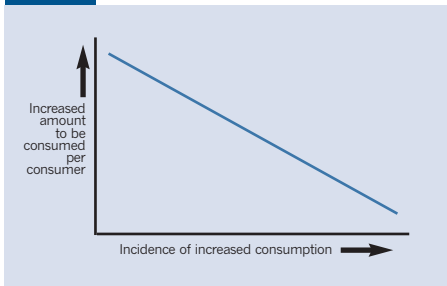
If the brand growth strategy is taking the brand into new waters, you may need to front-load the investment pattern in order to clearly communicate your new ▶

FIGURE 2



focus brandgrowth

FIGURE 3



approach and avoid simply re-triggering the previous brand communication messages.

Most brand communication has important medium-to-long-term effects, so it would be logical to offset any increase in communications budget over at least the next three years.

To maximise effectiveness, the communications message should be built exclusively around the brand growth strategy – if it's all about increasing the brand's safety image rating (safety being defined by your brand tracking research as the brand image attribute that will make the brand more appealing to new users, for example), then the communications should clearly focus on safety in the message.

Breaking out of the category's communication stereotypes will also help the brand to signal that it is saying something new and different, seeking consumer re-appraisal. Dove's successful skin-firming campaign used real women with real body shapes, which stood out from the competition and achieved unprecedented levels of free PR for the brand.

The full power of an integrated 360-degree communications plan will help to maximise the efficiency needed to deliver the brand growth strategy – stretching from packaging to post-sales communication – every means to communicate the brand growth strategy should be taken. To miss out the follow-through is a lost growth opportunity – the successful use of in-store recipe leaflets to support the Sainsbury's Jamie Oliver ads is a simple example of how to consolidate brand growth communication via a 360-degree approach.

Communication for brand growth also has an internal dimension – the brand growth strategy will no doubt be very demanding on the sales and marketing teams – the brand should be communicating the success of the brand growth strategy to all concerned, sharing success stories and creating that important motivation that will drive further brand growth. ■

s.burden@added-value.com

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