

MAKING **OLD** BRANDS **NEW**

A good brand doesn't have to go the way of Hai Karate men's cologne or Ajax cleaning scrub. Most mature brands pack plenty of brand equity and characteristics that can set them apart from competitors. With astute management, their appeal can shine for new generations of users.

BY BRIAN WANSINK

Burma Shave, Brylcreem, Pepsodent, Ovaltine, William's Lectric Shave, RC Cola, Barbasol, Hai Karate, Black Jack Gum. At one point, these brands were widely recognized and frequently purchased. Many have now faded or become "ghosts" of their former selves. Their numbers are legion. In 1993, Nabisco reported 29 ghost brands; Shering-Plough 17; and Smith-Kline 14, according to Stuart Elliott of the *New York Times*.

While some fading brands are dying because of shifting consumer needs, heavy competition, or waning awareness, others are suffering from marketing malpractice. Many well-trained brand managers believe that brands—like people—follow predictable, irreversible life cycles: they grow, they mature, they decline, and they die. When sales fall, they respond by cutting back on marketing activities and reallocating funds to new brands.

Without ongoing investment of time, thought, or money, a fading brand's sales will continue to drop. This strengthens the original prognosis that there's no help for an old brand,

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thus leading to even less attention and care. Some brands are nurtured back to health when this happens, but many die a lingering death as heavily discounted or regionalized brands.

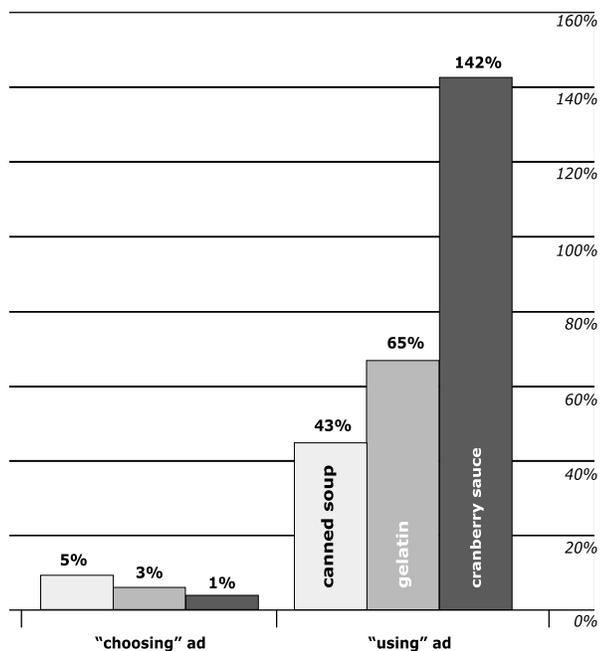
Lately, however, the \$75-to-\$100-million price tag on launching a new brand is renewing corporate interest in the less costly option of revitalizing old brands. Not all brands are worthy of a new life. The challenge for brand managers is determining which brands can be revitalized and how best to do it.

THE SECOND TIME AROUND

Many companies take little time or effort to understand the life and death of ghost brands, which is why "brands that fail tell no tales." Yet many mature brands have untapped potential. At the Brand Lab at the University of Illinois, we set out to identify what makes a brand a candidate for revitalization by

NOT JUST FOR THANKSGIVING

(percent increase in average monthly amount used for selected products after viewing "choosing" and "using" advertisements*, 1994)



*"Choosing" ads tout common uses for products; "using" ads suggest nontraditional uses. Use was tracked for a three-month period after subjects viewed ads.

Source: experiments by the author

Cranberry sauce gets a big boost in consumption when ads suggested nontraditional uses.

analyzing mature brands that were successfully relaunched, and older brands that are still well liked by consumers.

First, we collected extensive information on 84 brands of consumer packaged goods. This included annual dollar sales, volume sales, and distribution channels, such as grocery stores, mass merchandisers, and drugstores. Then we talked to 360 members of the Brand Revitalization Consumer Panel, a group of primarily female household decision-makers from five states. We asked them a series of subjective questions about their favorite brands among the 84, and what distinguishes them from similar products.

When we matched data from panelists' interviews with objective information on the brands, here's what we learned. In general, brands that have been revitalized were perceived as having meaningful characteristics that set them apart from other brands. They typically have a time-tested heritage or reputation, are widely distributed in grocery stores, drug stores, and mass merchandisers, and are under-advertised and under-promoted compared with other brands in their category. Revitalized brands weren't

the cheapest, either. They tended to be medium- to premium-priced products.

Jeffrey Himmel, chairman and chief executive of the Himmel Group in New York, is a veteran of brand revitalization. His firm has breathed new life into Porcelana fade cream, Topol toothpaste, Doan's Pills, Gold Bond Medicated Powder, and Ovaltine. The best candidates for revitalization, he says, are high-margin products with few shelf-keeping units (SKUs). SKUs are assigned to each size and variety of consumer packaged good on the market. Crest toothpaste, for instance, once had more than 60 SKUs. Products that come in multiple variations often have difficulty communicating a focused marketing message. The best brands to revitalize are those that can be contract-manufactured through multiple sources, and can be heavily advertised on radio or television 52 weeks a year, says Himmel.

These criteria have worked well for the Himmel Group. In 1973, it purchased Topol tooth polish for \$200,000. Over the next ten years, Himmel built it into a brand with sales of \$23 million a year. The same strategy raised Ovaltine from its deathbed to a vital, high margin, market leader.

Once a brand is chosen for revitalization, it's on to the work of getting it back into the minds—and households—of consumers. Brand managers have two opportunities to influence customers: when they choose a brand, and when they use it.

CHOOSING OLD FAITHFUL

Consumers shun old brands for many reasons. Bay Rum might remind a 20-year-old of his feeble grandfather. Aspergum is perceived as a relic by cold sufferers, who assume that modern medicine has come up with a better treatment for sore throats. Yet the underlying reason for rejecting mature brands is unfavorable attitudes toward them. In research with our consumer panel, we often heard that older brands had lost their appeal, lost their identity, and were overshadowed by competing brands.

Altering the characteristics of a brand or changing its packaging are often good ways to sweep away negative attitudes and boost sales. These changes aren't without risk—witness

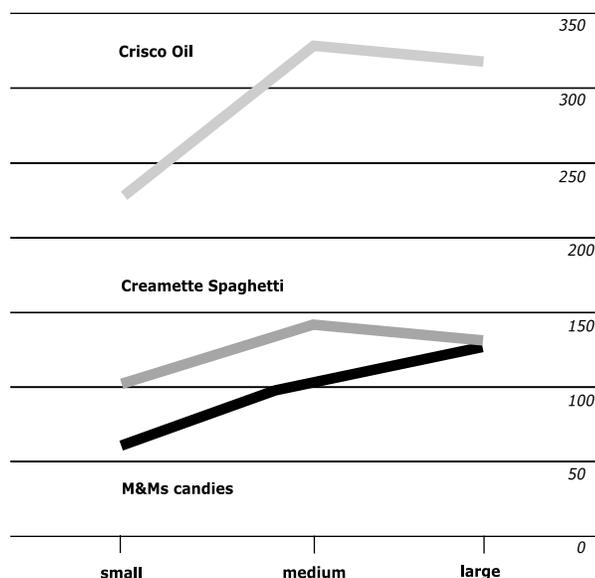
The best way to jump-start a mature brand is by understanding its uniqueness and equity.

New Coke. But for some brands, a new look on the inside or outside has made a positive difference.

Aqua Velva aftershave lotion retained its trademark scent and color, and started its revitalization by developing a more convenient bottle and a snappier label. Lavis mouthwash generated sizable sales increases because the clear "crystal fresh" version of its product appealed to young customers who had never used it before. Other successful modifications, such as some done by the Leaf Company (manufacturer of Good & Plenty, Heath bars, Zero, and Payday), involve reverting to original recipes, and extending familiar favorites into new forms, such as bite-size Heath Sensations.

WHEN BIGGER IS BETTER

(units consumed for three products, by size of package, 1996)



Note: Results are from an experiment conducted with members of the Consumer Brand Revitalization Panel. Units for oil and spaghetti are based on the amount used to make a meal for two; units for M&Ms are amount consumed while watching a video.

Source: experiments by the author

A medium-sized package prompts consumers to use more of the products tested.

Updated formulations or packaging are important, and they may result in modest sales increases. The best way to jump-start a mature brand is by understanding its uniqueness and equity, and making the most of them.

The most significant characteristics that separate one brand from another may not be the most obvious ones. Understanding the deeper meanings of brands to the people who buy them is the focus of a laddering research method developed by Charles Gengler, a marketing professor at Rutgers University–Camden. Consumers are first presented with three brands, including the mature brand being tested, and queried about their preferences.

The researcher then probes responses by asking questions that build on each answer. For instance, if one reason the respondent likes a breakfast cereal is because of its mascot, the next question is, “What is it you like about the mascot?” The respondent might say, “He’s always positive and full of energy.” The researcher’s next question is, “Why is that important to you when eating a breakfast cereal?” to which the respondent says, “It reminds me of being young, and it makes me think the day might be off to a good start.” At this point, the researcher has uncovered an underlying emotional, or higher-order, attribute of the brand being tested—it conjures up images of energy and youthful possibilities.

Data from laddering interviews are analyzed to determine the likely importance of various higher-order attributes in brand choice. The results are then compared with customer prototypes to identify the highest-yield consumer segments for targeting.

One company used this technique to generate more sales of a brownie mix. Laddering interviews and analysis revealed that many consumers associate making brownies with being a good mother and with baking for special occasions. The company turned this information into a promotion with a greeting card company. Some kids’ birthday cards included a coupon for brownie mix and a recipe for decorating pans of brownies with candy.

When a North American dairy council used the research technique, it learned that current adult milk drinkers tended to have warmer and happier memories of childhood than did non-drinkers. People with fond childhood memories who weren’t milk drinkers were an untapped market for the product. The council pitched milk as a comfort food, targeting adults who had the highest potential to become heavy milk drinkers.

Arm & Hammer marketed its baking soda as a deodorizer for refrigerators, freezers, and kitchen sink drains.

Laddering research typically yields many higher-order points of differentiation among brands. So even though it’s a rich source of information, brand managers must be careful not to communicate too much information to potential purchasers. Multiple messages delivered in various forms dilute brand equity and confuse consumers, says Kevin Lane Keller, a marketing professor at Duke University. To make the most of a brand’s uniqueness, advertising, packaging, and promotions should all emphasize a single, clear, consistent message.

HEY, BUY ME!

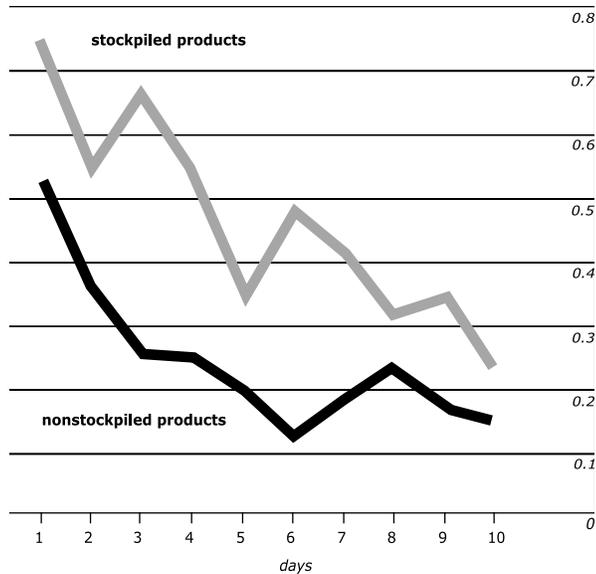
Salient brands are the brands people buy. A salient brand is one of which consumers are aware, either by seeing it at the point-of-purchase, or by having it in mind. That top-of-mind awareness is what leads them to put a specific brand on a shopping list or to make a special trip for it.

Trade journals and retail associations consistently report many creative ideas for generating point-of-purchase awareness. The sales-boosting success of many of these ideas confirms what seem like obvious strategies. Bright packages, sale signs, catchy displays, and wide shelf-facing all increase our awareness of a brand. Yet less obvious are recent findings that end-aisle displays and suggestive selling can increase sales, even if the product is not discounted.

A recent study I conducted with Robert Kent and Stephen Hoch demonstrated that ticklers like “Buy 12 Snicker’s Bars for your freezer” not only increase awareness, but can nearly double the number of units a shopper intends to buy.

THE MORE WE HAVE, THE MORE WE USE

(average units used daily for selected stockpiled and nonstockpiled products, 1997)



Note: Daily use is the average amount of chips, candy, juice, and granola consumed.

Source: experiments by the author and Pierre Chandon

People tend to eat more of things that are in large supply around the house.

Brands have top-of-mind awareness when they have recently been used, or when recently advertised. Himmel, the brand revitalization pro, attributes his successes to raising top-of-mind awareness for a mature brand, and commanding a large share of the total advertising messages for products in its category.

By focusing on a simple, single-minded point of differentiation, his advertising campaigns use testimonials that are broadcast frequently and consistently. Brands with limited advertising budgets have effectively increased top-of-mind awareness by advertising distinctions on their labels. Trix Cereal, for instance, used a side panel to note complementary products on which Trix could be sprinkled. And Murphy's Oil Soap printed a series of uses for the product under peel-off stickers affixed to its spray bottles.

Research with the Consumer Brand Revitalization Panel shows how important suggestions like these can be. Simply encouraging purchase is not enough. The unfortunate curse that's befallen some brands is that they are "cupboard captives"—owned but not used. Sixty-three percent of the panel households in my studies possessed Tabasco sauce. But 32 percent had had their bottle so long the sauce had turned from red to brown. Similarly, 35 percent had vitamins they had not opened in the past 12 months. An unopened package of cook-

ies lasted more than 6 months in 41 percent of households without children.

NEW USES FOR OLD BRANDS

A brand manager who increases the number of units, such as cans of soup, that a household uses from four to five each year, realizes a 25 percent increase in sales without having to convert a single new user. This is true for both light and heavy users. One way to increase frequency of use is to suggest new uses for a brand.

Numerous old brands have revitalized their sales this way. Consider Arm & Hammer's situation in 1969. Sales were dropping because of a decline in home baking and the introduction of ready-to-bake packaged food products. Revitalization was critical. Arm & Hammer responded by marketing its baking soda as a deodorizer for refrigerators, freezers, and kitchen sink drains. Sales skyrocketed.

The key to effectively advertising a new use for an old brand lies in making new uses appear similar to existing ones. The original use provides an "attitude halo" for the new use, and eases its adoptability.

This was demonstrated in a series of studies in which homemakers viewed a series of advertisements for canned soup, cranberry sauce, and gelatin. The "choosing" soup ad touted soup as hot and nutritious; the "using" ad described soup as a hot and nutritious option for a snack. The "using" ads increased the amount used over a three-month period for the three products tested by an average of 73 percent, or 1.2 units per month.

Perhaps the quickest way to increase usage frequency is to position a brand as a substitute for products in other categories. For instance, advertising campaigns encourage consumers to eat Philadelphia cream cheese instead of butter on bread, to eat Special K breakfast cereal instead of cookies in the afternoon, and to serve Orville Redenbacher popcorn instead of potato chips and peanuts at a party. These attempts are most successful when the substitute is seen as different—but not too different—from the original product. If the substitute brand and the original product are too different, their similarities should be advertised. If they are too similar, their differences should be advertised.

Altering package sizes can also effectively increase use frequency. As a general rule of thumb, if a brand manager is trying to decide which of two packages to introduce—say 20 ounces versus 24 ounces—the larger of the two packages should encourage greater volume consumption per use. In tests of 47 products in various categories, larger packages increased single-occasion usage by 19 percent to 152 percent, with a median increase of 32 percent.

Part of the reason usage acceleration occurs is because larger packages are simply perceived as less expensive to use than smaller packages. Nevertheless, there is a limit to how much spaghetti a household can eat on one occasion, or how much detergent it can use in a week. Once the limit or saturation point is reached, a larger package has no additional impact on use volume.

My Aftershave Belongs to Daddy

Remember the Old Spice mariner, dressed in a burly sailor cap and pea coat with a seagoing burlap sack slung over his shoulder? That's him over there playing beach volleyball. Old Spice aftershave is younger than ever, despite turning 60 this year. It has to be. Successfully selling a mature product to young men means staying contemporary. And for Old Spice, that means body splash and professional beach volleyball tournaments.

"Old Spice users are very, very loyal," says Carol Boyd of Procter & Gamble, makers of aftershave since 1990. The Old Spice fragrance remains attractive after all these years, going head-to-head in blind tests with any designer cologne you care to mention. "But the image is an issue that we look at all the time," says Boyd. The same capital a mature brand accrues in name recognition has the potential to trap it in a time warp.

But both Old Spice and another mature aftershave, Aqua Velva, are successfully reaching younger men by keeping to the timeless strengths of the product, expanding the line, and updating their image. Aqua Velva has refocused on its traditional identity as a refreshing, invigorating part of the morning routine. This has been as important as sprucing up its image, says Bob Sheasby, vice president of marketing at the J. B. Williams Company, makers of Aqua Velva.

The brand got off track in the 1970s by trying to compete with the emerging designer cologne market. Television spots featuring likable football star Dick Butkiss chiding quarterbacks for wearing sissy colognes put the brand at a competitive disadvantage by abandoning its fundamental identity as a refreshing toner.

By the early 1990s, "Aqua Velva men" were mature themselves—the typical user was aged 50 or older. Yet in mall-intercept interviews and focus groups, the tried and true Ice Blue fragrance proved as popular as ever. The brand hadn't lost name recognition, either. Even after years of being overshadowed by flashier fragrances, younger men remembered the aftershave. The problem was how they remembered it.

"My dad wore it," many said. For others it was an uncle, the groovy bachelor who drove a sports car. The memories were fond, the scent appealing, but the images dated Aqua Velva as a product of an earlier, older generation. Aqua Velva needed to get groovy again.

In the meantime, a dab or five or ten of CKOne behind a young man's ears has become common on a Saturday night, says Sheasby. But cologne has primarily expanded the fragrance market, not cornered it. In fact, Aqua Velva researchers were encouraged by respondents' preferences in men's daily fragrance. Both men and women said they favor a clean, comfortable scent for every day use. The heavy, spicy, sweet, or predatory smells of Saturday night weren't preferred on a weekday.

Aqua Velva was reintroduced as the refreshing, invigorating, daily slap in the face after the morning shave. It reappeared in a trendier bottle, and the line was expanded to include other grooming products, such as deodorant and body splash. A second flavor, Ice Sport, was introduced, primarily for younger men. At about the same time that researchers for Aqua Velva were hitting shopping malls, Procter & Gamble threw a retirement party for the Old Spice mariner. His replacement sports a T-shirt and base-

ball cap, and commands a sleek racing yacht. He looks more like an Ivy League grad than a rugged sailor. And he's apparently on his way—not to sea—but to the health club. He's traded the burlap sack for a gym bag. Old Spice also extended its line, introducing a successful long-lasting deodorant called High Endurance.

Boyd of Procter & Gamble points to the strong sales of High Endurance as a sign of a successful strategy combining the Old Spice fragrance, new technology, a contemporary product, and youth-oriented advertising. Old Spice claims an easy majority of total aftershave sales, 31 percent for the 12 weeks ending August 1997, according to *Drug Store News*.

The Aqua Velva man these days may be your son, not your father. The average age of Aqua Velva users is quickly falling, says Sheasby of J. B. Williams. The company's new variation on the classic blue tonic, Ice Sport, is making inroads with the 25-plus crowd, he says, while the original Ice Blue is most popular with men aged 25 to 45.

With its new packaging and advertising that communicates exhilaration, Aqua Velva has outperformed many competitors since its redesign more than a year ago, Sheasby says. Dollar sales of Ice Blue and Ice Sport combined were up 21.3 percent in the 12 weeks ending in August 1997, even as overall aftershave sales among the eight major brands declined 3.4 percent, according to *Drug Store News*. Some major brands saw sales tumble up to 28 percent during the period.

We'll have to see which aftershave brands have staying power, and which hit the skids for good. Anyone remember Hai Karate?

—Kevin Heubusch

In one experiment, subjects were asked to prepare a meal for two using vegetable oil and spaghetti. The volume of oil used was greater for medium than for small bottles, but it does not increase further with large bottles. Goodies are a different story, though. When subjects munched M&Ms candy while viewing a video, the larger the package, the more they ate.

Packaging can make products seem more convenient, and convenience often makes people use more. Recent research with the Brand Revitalization Consumer Panel suggests that perceptions of convenience are primarily based on the time and effort required to use a product. If it's not possible to reduce the time required or "hassle," perceptions or conven-

ience may be improved by careful selection of a comparison product. For instance, pizza mixes are perceived as 62 percent more convenient when advertisements compare them with scratch pizza rather than frozen pizza.

MAKING THE MOST OF STOCKPILING

The more soft drinks we have at home, the more we tend to drink, right? Not always. A brand that is out of sight is out of mind. While stockpiling increases how frequently people use a brand, it does so only when the brand is salient—that is, when it is either physically vis-

ible or on the top of one's mind. Brands are also highly salient and frequently used—shortly after they are purchased. Encouraging stockpiling through promotions or multi-packs increases the frequency of use, but so does any promotion that encourages consumers to frequently purchase a product.

To get consumers to clear stockpiled items out of household inventory and purchase more, marketers must keep their brands on the minds of users. While nearly any type of advertising increases salience, the most effective ads are those that are seen or heard just prior to a usage decision.

Brand managers obviously can't predict when people will stand in front of their cupboards to pick canned vegetables for dinner. Yet there are some windows of opportunity. Coke aired its "Drive-time Drinking" radio ads to encourage commuters to drink Coke while driving home. Similarly, Campbell's Soup raised brand salience by broadcasting "Storm Spot Ads" during inclement weather. Radio's flexibility allowed the ads to be broadcast prior to lunch and to dinner.

There's even a chance to speak to the customer at her cupboard—an ad on a product's package. The audience is captive, the cost per exposure is low, and the opportunity cost of what might otherwise be on the package is often negligible.

Revitalizing old brands is like reopening old mines. Some will be barren, others may hide gold. Academic research shows us that many once-successful brands have something to offer modern consumers, whether it's a brand they once trusted or

the nostalgia of years past. The rule to remember is "Never say die." Fifty years ago, Burma Shave was a proud and prosperous brand. Forty years ago, it was the Edsel-like punch line for jokes. In late 1997, Burma Shave's relaunch was announced with a miner's zeal. Maybe this will be the text of its first outdoor advertisement:

*When something's a waste
It's gone in good haste
A good brand though
Should never go
Burma Shave*

TAKING IT FURTHER

Data on brand choice and use, and perceptions of mature brands were collected at the Brand Lab at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Brian Wansink and Cynthia Huffman are conducting ongoing research on brand revitalization. For more information on the Brand Lab, the Brand Revitalization Consumer Panel, and other brand-related research, contact the author at 350 Commerce West, University of Illinois, Champaign, IL 61820; telephone (217) 244-0208. Relevant research reports can be downloaded from <http://www.cba.uiuc.edu/~wansink/index.html>.