

Brand!



Two years ago, in a bit of a marketing gamble, PepsiCo launched a massive campaign that would place it in the role of educator. Recognizing that Americans were becoming increasingly interested in health and wellness, the Purchase, N.Y.-based company began masking its product pitches with more instructive information on the benefits of nutritious foods. The program, called Smart Spot, was designed to help consumers choose healthier products while it subtly promoted PepsiCo-produced foods and beverages that met certain nutritional guidelines.

Today, more than 250 PepsiCo products sport a green Smart Spot stamp, which shows they contain at least 10 percent of the recommended daily value of a targeted nutrient, have specific health and wellness benefits, contain limited amounts of fat, sodium, and/or sugar, or also include healthier ingredients, such as whole grains. "The Smart Spot products grew at more than two and a half times the rate of the rest of our portfolio in 2005," says Lynn Markley, vice president of public relations for health and wellness at PepsiCo. "Consumers are looking for healthier products. Clearly we're meeting the demand."

PepsiCo, which actively promotes Smart Spot through television and print advertisements, recently announced a partnership with the nonprofit organization KaBOOM! to create Smart Spot playgrounds across the country, providing children with a safe place to get more exercise. The company is also partnering with the YMCA of the USA and America on the Move to raise health awareness and promote active, healthy lifestyles.

PepsiCo isn't the only company that has embraced the educational marketing concept. Several major brands in a variety of industries are using promotions to educate consumers about not only specific products but also entire product categories. As a result, consumers not only make well-informed buying decisions, experts say, they

School Your Customers

Marketing executives from PepsiCo to General Mills to The Home Depot are learning that educating consumers about a product category can help build brand loyalty **By Tamara E. Holmes**



Major brands are using a variety of approaches to educate consumers about healthy products.

nutrition community, and we want to help communicate these important messages by using some of the best real estate there is," said John Haugen, vice president of Big G marketing, when the initiative was launched. "The cereal box is one of the most read items in the home. With cereal consumed in 93 percent of American households and with the information on more than 100 million General Mills cereal boxes, this is a powerful step forward in nutrition education."

Kraft Foods took a different approach to educational marketing by focusing on a niche market: South Beach dieters. In January, as this target audience looked for ways to start the year off right, the Northfield, Ill.-based company launched the Beach in a Box Tour. Kraft officials traveled to nine cities to inform consumers about how to prepare nutritious meals and maintain good eating habits while, at the same time, they were softly selling healthy Kraft products. Although it's too early to determine how product sales will

also become more receptive to product pitches because they are more trusting of the companies they do business with. "Marketers can change people's behavior by educating them," contends Fred Senn, founding partner of the Minneapolis, Minn.-based advertising agency Fallon Worldwide and coauthor of *Juicing the Orange: How to Turn Creativity into a Powerful Competitive Advantage*.

Enhancing Lives

General Mills recognizes the value in helping to educate health-conscious consumers on eating well and living better. In 2004, it launched the interactive Web site BrandNewYou.com, where visitors get tips on calorie counting, portion control, and exercise. Consumers can learn about General Mills' portion-controlled offerings, such as 100-calorie popcorns and soups, and can download Betty Crocker low-fat recipes.

Another online campaign of General Mills' revolves around Green Giant, the

leading vegetable brand in the country. To help consumers better understand the importance of vegetables to a healthy diet, the company launched Greengiant.com in 2005. The site offers quizzes, recipes, and even a vegetable tracker to help consumers ensure that they're fulfilling the dietary

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guidelines established by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Agriculture.

In fact, after the guidelines were announced in April 2005, General Mills launched a nutrition education initiative, the highlight of which was displaying the food pyramid on the boxes of its Big G cereal brands — including Total Raisin Bran, Cheerios, and Wheaties. "The guidelines are the collective efforts of the American

be affected by the tour, the company has deemed it a success thanks to the high consumer turnout, says Sydney S. Lindner, associate director of corporate affairs for Kraft Foods.

The health and wellness industry is not the only one for which educational marketing has worked. The Home Depot has succeeded in building customer loyalty through its popular how-to clinics. "Our how-to clinics started in

the aisles years ago,” says John Claybrooks, director of brand marketing. “An associate would be helping a customer and explaining how to do different projects, and before you knew it, a crowd of people would gather around to listen and learn.”

The Home Depot stores started conducting how-to clinics based on

entertaining and creative the information, the more engaged customers will be, and the more likely they will be to trust that company’s products. However, there are instances when educational marketing could easily take the wrong approach. “Most advertising that we see treats people like they’re stupid,” says Bart Cleveland, partner and

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— John Claybrooks, director of brand marketing for The Home Depot

customer requests in select locations around 2001, and then other stores across the country began to follow suit. In 2003, the company launched Do-It-Herself, women-only clinics that have attracted more than 280,000 participants. The company also offers Kids Workshops, in which children are taught about tool safety and allowed to take part in some do-it-yourself projects.

“The how-to clinics provide an opportunity for customers to receive personal attention to assist with their do-it-yourself projects,” Claybrooks says. “In doing so, customers develop a level of comfort with the store and with the products needed to help finish the job. This confidence and comfort with The Home Depot and its associates bring customers back again and again.”

Typing It Together

The key to a successful educational marketing campaign is recognizing the needs of the consumer. The more

creative director at McKee Wallwork Cleveland, a full service advertising agency based in Albuquerque, N.M. “It’s either too obvious or it’s condescending, and education-based campaigns can be especially guilty of that.”

Cleveland was particularly cognizant of that fact when he headed a recent anti-smoking campaign for the New Mexico Health Department. “These people are addicted to something and they feel vulnerable,” he says. “You have to be very careful not to be condescending.” Rather than go out with an educational message about the dangers of smoking, the company created documentary-style commercials that ran late last year and during the 2006 Super Bowl, contrasting smoking with other bad habits, such as nose-picking.

The company used humor to show people that smoking is not a bad habit, it’s an addiction. According to Cleveland, the New Mexico Health Department has seen spikes in its Help Line when the ads have run.

4 Ways to Stand Out

1 Keep It Light. While customers want to learn, they don’t want to feel like they’re in school. Avoid information overload.

2 Make It Entertaining. People like to be amused when they learn. Promotions such as games, quizzes, and contests can inform while they engage.

3 Incorporate Interactive Elements. The best campaigns allow customers to interact with others, whether it’s through an in-store presentation or an interactive Web site. An emotional connection can make consumers more loyal to your brand.

4 Point Out the Reward. Tell customers why the information you’re presenting will benefit them; then point out the value of your respective products.

If a company does decide to embark on an education-based marketing campaign, Fallon Worldwide’s Senn says, it must first figure out what its audience wants to know and then craft a message accordingly. If there is something crucial about the product category that consumers don’t know, “you can have not only a creative campaign but a campaign that is bankable,” he says. “When it comes down to the bottom line, that’s all an advertiser can ask for.” ■