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HIT OR MYTH? THE AMAZING TRUTH ABOUT THAT HEINEKEN CAMPAIGN

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Introduction

Our aim in this paper is to re-examine one of the longest-running stories in advertising research, 'The Story of the Really Great Heineken Ads'.

We intend to reveal The Truth of what actually happened when Heineken 'refreshed the parts other beers cannot reach'. All is *not* as you might think. This is a paper started by our colleague Judith Wardle, building on ideas in her recent book – available now at all good bookshops!

In doing this we wish to replace the *false view* of research as a lethal blunt instrument, a killer of creativity, with the *true position*, which is that research can and does contribute to great advertising.

If this sounds like a bit of a moral crusade, it isn't. Well, not exactly. The reason we wanted to do this paper (which has involved a lot of investigating, some of it still ongoing) stems from a feeling of almost existential exasperation which accompanies yet another re-telling of the 'The Story of the Really Great Heineken Ads – and how research nearly prevented it from happening.'

When I came into research about 20 years ago, the first conference I attended had ex-CDP execs on platform doing the Heineken Story - lots of funny ads were shown. Their implication was, research was not equal to (us) the challenge, it was harmful not helpful. This same story was still being given *last year*.

We researchers were well and truly 'done over' that time – framed for life! Research was (and often still is) portrayed as the villain of the piece, attempting to club the poor, newborn advertising idea to death... Except, we didn't! It wasn't us! We are good, and *maybe* we were right all along...

Of course, you won't know what research actually said at the time, since the story that adfolk give is a very partial version of events. Jan and I have tracked down the original research – to an N6 address – and we shall be telling you What Actually Happened.

So in a way, are correcting an injustice. We want to Free the Highgate One! But even although this is a 30 year long injustice, we are not pointing the finger at anyone else (we are not grassing anyone up). Years have 'wisened' us. It is time to work better together. Better relationships make for better ads.

In fact, we want to start by referencing these relationships as they are one of the key underlying dynamics of advertising development. Decisions were made about the



Heineken campaign which had everything to do with these relationships (power play) and little to do with what was right for the brand. Then we shall consider The Myth of the Really Great Heineken Ads, in all its glory, before concluding on a few points about advertising research.

The 'Tense Triangle'

The three main protagonists involved, client organisation, advertising agency and research, have in the past referred to this as the Tense Triangle. As with all good ideas, there is some dispute over ownership of this phrase or idea – both Roddy Glen and Paul Feldwick make competing claims. There should really be a third claim, so we shall put Judith in here. Did I mention her book already?

Not only are there three key and often opposing roles, there are also triangles-within-triangles. Take the Agency: planning, creative, account management. In the Client: corner, research/planning, brand/marketing and Board/finance.

When people adopt positions, defending their corner of the triangle, ganging up on one of the parties, things get tricky. Recently, it has become almost a case of research and client ganging up on ad agency. Back then, it was more the case of client and ad agency ganging up on research.

So often, advertising ideas do not survive, or suffer horrible damage through this process of 'Triangulation'.

In telling you the truth about the Heineken campaign, we are not going to name drop. We feel that it is more important to deal with decisions made, the roles involved, rather than personalities (but, if you want the real gen, see Jan in the bar later this afternoon!) We shall name the principal players only. Playing the part of client and agency and seen here together, are Antony Simonds-Gooding and Frank Lowe. In their role of researcher is a gentleman named Paul Gilden – no photo is available for him.

So, what actually happened? What did research say about those first Heineken ads? What did the advertising campaign really contribute to Heineken?

If we just told you straight, you probably wouldn't believe us. 30 years is a long time in advertising, particularly when for most of those years, somebody, somewhere is perpetuating the Great Heineken Advertising Myth. The more you say it the more it sticks. We even could not quite believe some of these things we found out, such is the power of the myth.

So let us start by setting out The Myth, which has several parts to it. Then we'll take each point in turn. Like all myths, of course, there are elements of truth involved, if there were not, the myth would be far less plausible.



The Myth of those Really Great Heineken Ads ‘

We could have chosen any of the hundreds of quotes which perpetuate the Great Heineken Ad Myth. Here are just a couple of examples - note the recurring themes.

‘Heineken’s “Refreshes the parts other beers cannot reach” met with huge resistance on first showing, as it broke all the rules of beer advertising....The team was brave enough to ignore the results (of qualitative research), based on a belief that the British public would grow to first learn and then love the idea. That intuition proved to be right and the campaign went on to be one of the most successful ever, building both sales and brand image over many years.’

David Taylor, The Brand Gym

‘The long-lived and well-loved Heineken campaign from the UK died in test and the first few executions didn’t do well on air. But the excellent client, Anthony Simons Gooding, trusted his own gut feel about it, and a truly exceptional ad campaign was born.’

Janet Kestin, US Creative

Let us take it bit by bit. We have listed six bits to the myth, which is not easy to say.

1. Heineken’s advertising was courageous and bold and quite different to what had gone before.

Well, we actually agree with this – to some extent. Beer and lager were predominantly drunk in pubs at that time, and most beer ads were set in pubs. The Heineken ads broke this mould by not showing blokes in pubs. As we would now say, it ‘challenged the conventions’.

But, it was not the first ad in its category to have a laugh - humour in ads was well established, and Guinness and Carling were both seen by many as funnier than the Heineken ads at the time.

And, the Heineken ads were not *entirely* original – the idea of ‘things are better after...’ (Badedas, Double Diamond, Carling Black Label...) is one of the archetypal advertising claims. It is a claim that alcohol brands in particular have been making since time immemorial. Alcohol transforms one’s view of – well – everything (including advertising campaigns?)

It is also, of course, another example of the old ‘before and after’ scenario. It wasn’t the first and it will almost certainly not be the last. Six years before the Great Heineken Ads, Double Diamond was showing ads where, for example, a dart player misses the board until he drinks a pint of DD, whereupon the next dart hits the bullseye.

‘It’s really a bit like ‘A Double Diamond works wonders’

Whitbread research 1974

Which is not to diminish those first two Heineken ads. In case your memory is in need of a little refreshment, here they are. (Play the first 2 ads, please.)

play ‘Piano Tuner’ and ‘Policemen’ (VHS)



2. ***The research said, 'don't do it!' after the first couple of ads were made.***

We have tracked down and read the original research. It was carried out in April 1974 by a researcher named Paul Gildea. The report is 20 pages long and on none of these pages does it say 'don't do it'.

The research is based on 30 depth interviews with male lager drinkers and their responses to three finished ads, shown in black-and-white. These ads were The Piano Tuner (45 secs) and Policemen (30 secs), which we have seen and a third ad called Dancers (45 secs).

3 ads,
sample

The research objectives were:

1. to evaluate the three commercials in terms of communication and comprehension
2. to identify any particular strengths and weaknesses in each
3. to provide creative guidance for advertising development

The timing of this research is interesting. The advertising broke in March, 1974 and this research was carried out *the following month*.

It has to be said, advertising researchers today would not have drawn the conclusions from the research that were drawn at the time, particularly as the ads had been on air for just a couple of weeks. The advertising was clearly different and unfamiliar – it had a certain shock factor - so it would always be hard to judge how it would work or develop after its initial showing.

The research did not shy away from being 'evaluative' (cf objective #1) despite these circumstances. In particular, respondents were cast in the role of advertising critics, their views and objections being passed on directly, as in:

'It's the type of ad for an established brand – just to refresh your memory. Wouldn't increase sales here'

Rather than asking, what do they *think* of the advertising (ie invitation to judge it), research now would look into *how people react and respond*. Paul Gildea could not have known how often his verbatims would be quoted (and probably mis-quoted) down the years. You will probably be familiar with some of these quotes:

'what's beer got to do with ears?' (Piano Tuner)

'not the sort of thing you'd like to see when you're eating your tea' (Policemen)

'beer's supposed to refresh you, they say it's a medicine'

There was also a respondent's snap judgement about the strapline passed on...

'On its own it doesn't stick. No rhythm about it'

...which assumes that straplines should be catchy and stand alone like 'A Double Diamond works wonders'.



The research does say that the advertising was on strategy, and endorses the need to focus on refreshment as the point of difference and raison d'être for lager and for this brand. It also raises the point that the idea of 'refreshment' as conveyed in the advertising is different to the actual benefit of Heineken/lager being a refreshing drink.

'The commercials are seen as concentrating exclusively on the 'restorative' effect of Heineken at the expense of its appeal as an enjoyable drink'

It is the start of a question which we shall return to – how well did the Heineken advertising sell pints (and cans) of Heineken, over the years? How did the advertising campaign and the brand's fortunes relate? This is the first suggestion that the advertising vehicle may not deliver sufficient brand equity, over the long term. This would have been a remarkably astute point to end on, but there was one last recommendation (cf objective #3 creative guidance)...

'in future Heineken advertising a more direct confrontation with keg bitter should be considered. Keg beer can be tackled ...in terms of its alleged inferiority in taste temperature and consistency'

In other words an ad that says:

'Keg beer? Ain't it 'orrible! That Continental Heineken lager is colder, better tasting and more consistent. Buy some today'

So, yes, maybe this initial research did make some hasty judgements about the advertising, but it also recognised the potential (and the limitations) in the advertising's main theme and was a good piece of work. But wait for it (and you probably did not know this...) *it was not the only research carried out in those early days.*

Whitbread researched the campaign later in the year (September) after four executions had been shown – 'Frankenstein' and 'Potter' in addition to the first two ads.

This research was done by the Strategic Planning Unit and was based on twenty interviews, the objectives being similar in scope and intent to those of the original research. There had been more time for the advertising to sink in and the researcher notes that respondents were fairly familiar with the ads.

This research backed up the initial research project's recognition of the advertising's strengths and was able to get to grips with how the advertising was working. We don't know how many television ratings were bought during the year but it must have been far higher than we are used to seeing for a brand on TV today

'The advert (Frankenstein) is very amusing – the only thing I object to – it comes on every half hour and you get tired of it'

The research also showed that people were appreciating the advertising's creative idea:

'The visual interpretation of the 'revival' of the monster through drinking Heineken was seen in a number of ways ...in general the actual claim was seen as part of the joke and not taken seriously by most respondents'

Frankenstein
and Potter
screen grabs



Rather than making snap judgements, this time the research concludes that:

'the selling effectiveness was very difficult to judge ... the advertising had high interest, high attention, high recall and general appreciation, (although) respondents felt it was not the real intention of the commercial to "sell" the drink so much as to keep it in people's memory when they went to a pub'

Far from knocking the advertising, this research noted that it was found 'clever' and 'amusing' and that it 'stood out from other advertising'. Again the point is raised, how does the advertising communication relate to the reality of the brand and product in the marketplace? The research notes that the Heineken campaign used comic, 'far-fetched' depictions of refreshment which are enjoyed as a *piece of advertising* but which position the brand away from the 'everyday'.

'some respondents felt that Skol and Carling (and Guinness) advertising were more related to social drinking occasions'

So what both pieces of research are saying (perhaps not in these terms) is:

- unusual and different advertising, with a strong advertising idea ('refreshment')...
- ... which has yet to translate into a competitive brand property - watch out for product positioning/cues, by the way
- and also watch out for user values and the residual communication of the campaign over time

The second piece of research has not been recorded, of course, in the Great Heineken Advertising Swindle, but it is a crucial part of what actually happened. The first piece of research is used as ammunition by adfolk to say that research cannot handle creative work. But in fact both studies - especially the second one - show that:

- not only *can* research handle creative work (especially once given half a chance to understand how the advertising was working)...
- but also in the case of the Heineken campaign, it got it more or less right.

3 *The agency persevered, for creative reasons, so strongly did they believe in the campaign*

It was almost certainly right to persevere with the fledgling campaign after the sceptical initial research. The subsequent research (kept under wraps) backed up this decision and was able to provide a more rounded assessment of the strengths and possible long-term weaknesses of the campaign.

But the reason that the agency persevered had much more to do with business issues than creative issues – it was more about personalities and politics than about propositions and production values.

First of all, from the client side, there was something of a revolution starting within Whitbread. Traditionally, the breweries were very much production-led. The business was about producing barrels full of beer and distributing these around the pubs, many of which were owned by the same breweries. The person in charge was the Head Brewer.



The mentality and the vast majority of beer volumes up until now, lay in the on-trade (pubs). Hence advertising slogans like:

'don't waste valuable Tavern time' (for Courage's Tavern ale)
'Trophy, the pint that thinks it's a quart'

The licensed off-trade, grocery outlets, had only started when the Heineken campaign was first aired in the mid-1970s and provided only limited distribution (like most shops, they used to close at 5.30pm). Shops had quite a different profile to pubs - many more women than men, for a start - and Whitbread's marketing department were determined to develop the off-trade so that Heineken could reach this wider audience. Their appeal to the Board won favour, marketing budgets were secured and so began a power shift away from production towards marketing.

As an example of the explosion in the off-trade, Whitbread's own chain of off-licenses, Thresher, grew from 235 outlets in 1974 to about 1500 in 1993, to the current number of about 5000. (One reason for their success was said to be that from an early stage, they extended their opening hours to 8pm!)

So secondly, from the advertising agency point of view, having got over the initial resistance to their campaign, they now had marketing effort and money behind them and carte blanche to produce famous advertising. They had a strong advertising idea (transformation/restoration) and strapline and were not constrained by having to feature the usual pub scenes or 'sexy' product shots (Heineken ads often featured the canned product).

So they persevered because they could and there was a strong vested interest in their success. It may have suited the agency that they had that first piece of research to rail against. 'What do we need research for?'

The Heineken campaign, first appearing in 1974, ran for close on 29 years. There are perhaps three phases. The first phase, using the famous line 'Refreshes the parts...' featured some 68 different executions and lasted until 1988. The second phase, with the line now changed to 'Only Heineken can do this' continued from the late 80s until 1998, with a much lower and more intermittent spend - only 33 executions this time, several of them very short. The third and final 5-year phase saw the line becoming, 'How refreshing, how Heineken' and ran to about 9 executions before it finally changed to 'Buy a pint of Heineken or we'll keep running this commercial'.
(source, Xtreme Information)

3 phases of the campaign

4 *The campaign was highly successful and talked about and increased brand awareness and product consumption.*

The campaign was certainly talked about. Still is! It featured in Channel 4's '100 Greatest TV Ads' at number 29. The campaign has been much feted over the years.

No doubt also that in those early years (mid to late 70s) it was also being talked up, since sales had picked up hugely and Whitbread could hardly make enough Heineken. This surely showed that the advertising had become a huge success in sales terms, as well as creatively?

70s outdoor pix



This misses out one vital factor - the weather. The 'summer of '76' is legendary, but it followed another scorching summer in 1975. It was the start of the Lager Revolution. The hot weather and the huge growth in these new, colder and refreshing lager beers changed the landscape of British drinking forever.

The whole market grew by some 25% and so of course Heineken's sales increased... as did those of Carling Black Label, Harp, Carlsberg and Skol and the others. None of the brewers could make enough lager. Heineken's share of the market did not appreciably increase relative to the competition.

no increase
in market
share

This may sound incredible. It is worth saying it again. Even with the strong advertising support behind it, Heineken did not gain market share over the 70s and early 80s.

It is true that as the off-trade channel grew Heineken later gained share here and went on to become the second biggest selling off-trade beer in the UK. This was part of the deliberate policy to promote itself towards the off-trade and to feature Heineken in packaged form, as mentioned. Heineken was one of the few brands to appear in small, 250 ml cans.

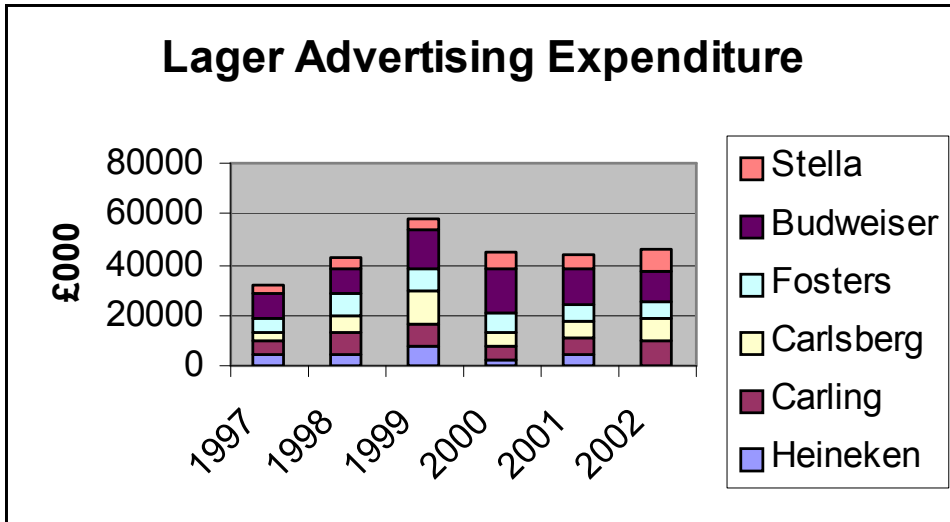
If the advertising cannot be proved to have increased share of volume, surely it increased brand awareness and improved brand imagery? Again, we can find *very little evidence of this*. Advertising tracking at the time showed that brand awareness and brand image measures *hardly changed*. The brand *did* score more highly than average on the attribute 'refreshing' however.

no real
increase in
brand
awareness

If the figures do not show tangible sales effects or image shifts from this first phase of the Heineken campaign (we have had trouble tracking down this data but have spoken to someone who has), surely these must have grown more favourable over time? We have looked very hard to evidence to support the long-term contribution of advertising to the brand over the second and third phases of the campaign, from the 80s onwards. Conventional wisdom might suggest that, with a consistent and single-minded campaign, a brand will build over time and will gain momentum, thus requiring lower spends to maintain it.

Longer tem?

So how did Heineken do once the advertising had well and truly bedded in, from the 80s onwards? Did the client get their money's worth from this most famous of campaigns, in the latter years?



3 x bar charts

Fig. 1

Heineken increased its marketing expenditure in 1999 but did not maintain the level of spend in 2000 and 2001. (Fig. 1). Brand share did not increase – it was maintained in the On Trade but declined in the Off Trade. (Fig. 2 and 3) (sources, Nielsen, Mintel and Interbrew)

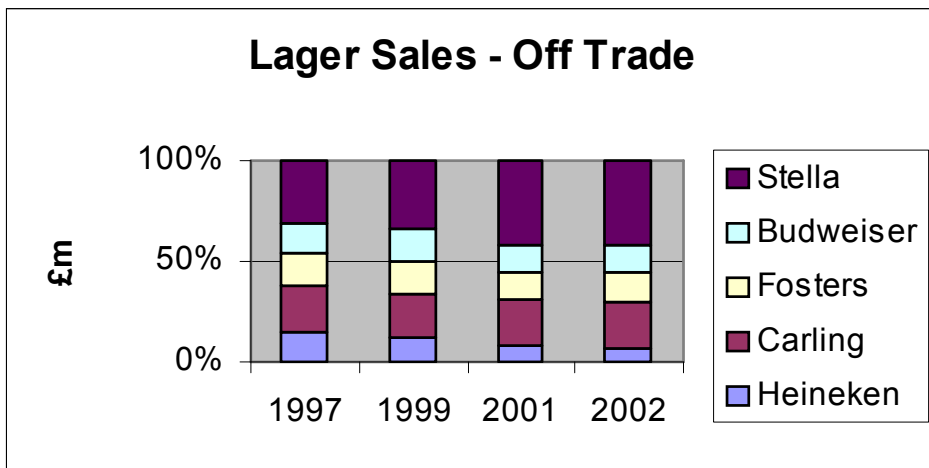


Fig. 2

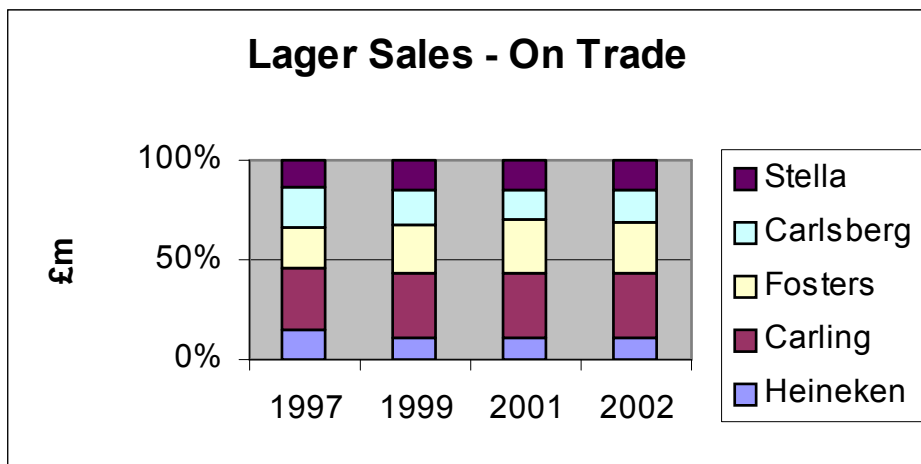


Fig. 3



We want to be clear about what we are saying here. The specific part of the myth we are countering is that Heineken's advertising was *very successful* in terms of (shall we say) increasing share of throat and share of mind. Our evidence (which we concede is not complete) suggests that:

1. in the first half of the campaign (ie up to late 80s), it was *not nearly as successful* as everybody (in advertising) says it was
2. in the latter part of the campaign (90s) it seemed to deliver a *rather poor return on investment*, despite all that had gone before

We have all heard the saying which goes, 'I know that half my advertising is working, I just don't know which half'. I wonder how many of you know who supposedly first said it and roughly when? It was John Wanamaker, the founder of WalMart in the year 1905. What he actually said (or rather, the version I read) was "I know that half my advertising dollars are wasted, I just don't know which half"

We are certainly not saying that the Heineken campaign was a complete waste of money. Our own view is that the campaign was *probably quite successful*, it was successful *up to a point* and that point was around 1985. Somewhere around the mid 1980s, Heineken's advertising property, its ability to refresh the advertising careers that other beers cannot reach, began to backfire.

It may be that the agency and all those they spoke to came to believe their own propaganda about the advertising's success. An example of the cottage industry which was growing up about the Great Heineken Advertising Myth was the 1983 Peter Mayle book, 'Thirsty Work, 10 years of Heineken advertising'. In it, he claims that Heineken sales 'went up by 300%' since the launch of the advertising.

It may have been that the new brands and the changing market conditions made Heineken's advertising approach seem increasingly out of step. Or, it may be that everyone was having too good a time to care very much.

5. *Owning the idea of refreshment provided a strong platform for the advertising and the brand.*

Appropriating a generic benefit *can* make for a successful long-running campaign because of the almost infinite campaignability that this strategy offers. There are those who have always maintained (and many still do) that the job of advertising is not to 'communicate' but to engage, preferably around a consistent theme. It is not what you say, but how you behave which counts.

As we have seen, the earliest pieces of research pointed out that 'refreshes the parts...' was an advertising idea rather than a dramatised product benefit. The advertising showed something or someone having been 'refreshed' by Heineken, rather than Heineken being 'a (more) refreshing pint'.

However it tied in with Heineken being only 3.2% ABV (alcohol by volume), slightly weaker than some of its competitors. A lower strength product supported the proposition 'refreshing' and (not coincidentally) was much more profitable for Whitbread to produce (the higher the ABV, the more duty is paid).



Over the course of the 1980s the perception of Heineken as a weak product became a bit of a problem. The brand leader, Carling, and several other brands had always been stronger and now newer, more exciting brands like Fosters and Castlemaine XXXX were available, at nearer the 4% mark. Heineken was later increased to 3.6%.

So the advertising theme of refreshment was inadvertently reinforcing the product's weakness, as it were, despite the fact that 'refreshes the parts' was accepted as a kind of joke. It was part of the established tradition of 'before and after' or 'brand X transforms...' advertising.

In 1989 a new line was introduced, 'Only Heineken can do this', which is the first half of the famous 'refreshes the parts' line. It looks as if ad budgets were cut in this second phase of the campaign and some of the ads were very short. They tended to be visual 'gags' and references to well known stories or icons.

In fact, the whole Heineken campaign was one of the earliest campaigns to appeal to the viewer as a *viewer* rather than *viewer-as-drinker*. This may be one of the reasons it did not always *connect* with the real world as well as it might have done. It is fascinating to look back and see just how many of the ads are about well known stories, characters and scenes from films and TV, even references to other advertising:

Viewer as viewer vs Viewer as drinker

Dixon of Dock Green, Frankenstein, a potter (early TV continuity footage), Scrooge (all 74), Star Trek, Emperor Nero, Little Red Riding Hood (75 - 77), Leslie Phillips and Charles Houghtree, Percy Thrower, Norman Wisdom, a strike causing a TV blackout, early video game (78 -80)

These cultural references reflected the breadth of the advertising, but they also contributed to its residual communication. Here are some more references used in the ads then some fuller descriptions of some of the other much loved ads in the campaign. Do you remember the one about...

- Sally The Musical Seal
- The Onion Seller
- The Snake Charmer
- The Kebab Singing "Oh Donna"
- The priest sitting on a chair who blows a party popper?

residual communication

What about the ones where...

Wordsworth fails to compose "Daffodils" until he has a Heineken. (1982)

Endline: Refreshes the poets other beers cannot reach

The scary movie wasn't scary, so Heineken is poured on to the Volcano and and Julie Andrews emerges on a grass hill and attempts to sing, but a horrifying scream ends it abruptly. (84)

Endline: Refreshes the scary parts other beers cannot reach

A posh lady can't learn how to speak Cockney until she has a can of Heineken (85)

Endline: Refreshes the parts wot other beers cannot reach

Man in a bar drinking Heineken. Annoying Yuppie is laughing and screaming down a large mobile phone. A red phone box falls down enclosing the man. (89)

Endline: Only Heineken can do this

Man watching Morris dancers has a sip of his Heineken. Instead of hitting their sticks together, the Morris dancers knock each other to the ground with their sticks. (90)

Endline: Only Heineken can do this

Various images from the Hein campaign



The residual communication from these ads reflected rather middle class values and themes. The humour was arguably graduate humour. There was also very little that was macho or manly in the ads. There were colourful individuals or caricatures but few groups shown, certainly no 'lads'. How drole, how Heineken.

There were the preppy ads with their implicit reinforcement of 'weak product', there was the intention to target women/the grocery trade...so it is not surprising that Heineken was emerging in the late 80s with the image of being a beer for 'wallies', or for 'w*****s' to quote the research of the time. (And it didn't mean 'Wombles')

a beer for
'wallies'

By the late 80s and early 90s, research was showing that despite being a 'good name' and having a vaguely Continental heritage, Heineken was becoming a kind of branded commodity, the safe, 'least bad option' - where the other two were Royal Dutch and some unknown 'Hangoverbrau'. It came in light green cans, they used to have some amusing adverts. It was a likeable brand in an effete sort of way, but not as respectable as, say Carlsberg.

Safe option;
likeable, not
respected

Meanwhile Fosters and XXXX continued apace with their harder edged, more masculine brand image. Premium packaged lagers were also coming on strong and as the money flowed and the shoulder pads grew bigger, the mood of assertive individualism made Heineken's world seem rather soft and gentle by comparison. Heineken was acceptable to have out of a tin at your auntie's, but was hardly a brand you would choose for yourself, or with your mates.

80s pix

The irony is that it was qualitative research which brought these issues to the attention of Whitbread's research department, which managed to persuade the Board that they should probably not be resting on their laurels but trying to make the brand more relevant to drinkers.

By 1992 Heineken Export was launched (featuring Stephen Fry as the 'smooth talking bar steward') but Whitbread's focus was shifting rapidly towards Stella Artois. Standard Heineken (called Cold Filtered Heineken) more or less stopped advertising in mainland GB from about 1993 and 1998. Heineken turned to rugby sponsorship and other forms of marketing support.

In 1998 after a long-ish gap, standard Heineken advertising re-introduced the refreshment theme, not as a before-and-after drinking Heineken demonstration, but now showing characters acting against stereotype in a 'refreshing' way. Some view this campaign as a return to form for the brand's advertising. It featured the ad in which workmen digging up the road suddenly became co-operative and mindful of others. It also featured the one with the traditionally poor blues singer abandoned by his wife who is immediately discovered and given a record contract.

2 x screen
grabs

As we have shown, the figures do not show any revival in the brand's fortunes and in this final phase of the Heineken campaign, arguably the writing is already on the wall.



6. *Heineken's advertising helped the brand become a long-term success and a worthy subject of countless advertising case studies!*

You can probably guess where this is heading. As we reach the final stage of the Great Heineken Advertising Myth, you can probably see just how far we are diverging from reality. It is a parallel, perhaps, to the way in which Heineken's advertising parted company with the brand reality, somewhere in the first or second phase of the campaign.

In 2000 Whitbread's brewing interests were taken over by Interbrew. In February 2003, Whitbread's licence to brew Heineken came to an end and the brand was withdrawn from the market. It was over, finished, no more.

History has not recorded what Heineken BV felt about the brand and its advertising in the UK. We do know that the late Freddie Heineken was never a fan of the UK-brewed product nor of its advertising. Heineken is of course a global beer brand, having expanded by acquisition to become one of the world's leading breweries.

Pic FH

Back in 1974, Heineken in the UK stood alongside brands such as Carling, Carlsberg, Harp, Skol, and Hofmeister. Later on it was up against Foster and Castlemaine XXXX. Who would have predicted that Heineken would not make it to the sunny uplands of brand history, along with the Carlsbergs, Carlings, Fosters and Castlemaine XXXXs, but would join Skol, Harp and Hofmeister in the brand dustbin?

Now, this is not a version of events that would be recognised by Heineken themselves. Here is what they have said of the matter (and if you were them, wouldn't you?):

'During the 90s, Heineken Cold Filtered continued to be a key player in the standard lager market... however, tastes of British drinkers were changing... (and) sales of standard (weaker) lagers (were) declining with many drinkers now preferring the taste of the stronger, continental-style lagers. As a result... with the license Heineken held with Whitbread expiring on 23rd Feb, 2003, from this date Heineken resumed responsibility for its brand and for the first time, the authentic, Dutch-brewed Heineken (5%) became available in the UK.'

So, farewell, UK-brewed Heineken, gone but not forgotten. We have all these ads to remember you by! The question we were left with is: did the advertising contribute to the long-term success of the brand, or to its long-term decline? (Could it be, a bit of both?)

History has already recorded how wonderful those great Heineken ads were and how they made the brand such a success. We hope that we have managed to re-write this little chapter of history. To stress this point, we are not saying that the advertising was solely responsible for the failure of the brand in the UK, far from it – but, it surely it played a part and perhaps there are lessons to learn. One of the lessons might be, try not to scoff when research tells you what you may need to know about the brand.

We would like to finish with a couple of thoughts. So far we have been defending qualitative research against the charming but dangerous, many-headed monster that is the Great Heineken Advertising Myth.



But we said earlier that good qualitative research helps to make great advertising. How? Well, here is one we made earlier – if you thought research and advertising do not go together, cop a load of this.

Play
Swimblack
(VHS, 60")

You will almost certainly have seen this ad before. But watch carefully, because you have probably not seen everything there is to see. One of the benefits of great ads, you can watch them over and over – like good research, you can't do it enough...

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. We deal with people – real people, with all their contradictions, everything they say and don't say, what they do, how they seem. We study human being-ness, how people deal with ideas and things – mediating between the world of brands, advertising and politics and the world of products and shops and families
2. By identifying the Creative Idea (or pivotal idea), qual can understand how the idea works, making it easier to extend and develop the idea over time. Done well, you can get to grips with the underlying structure of the communication and see how this fits with the product being advertised
3. How exactly does it work? It's a mystery, it's a kind of magic. Key ingredients are curiosity, open-ness, listening and respect. Anyone can do it if they try
4. It works best on advertising when: there is enough respect and honesty present; when it is used to develop, not to evaluate (as coach, not line judge)
5. Qualitative research cannot do everything: it cannot predict success, cannot anticipate production values and cannot account for familiarity
6. BUT, as a discipline it is flexible and sensitive and amazingly cost-effective... and easy to take for granted! It is hard for the untrained eye to distinguish between good and bad research – more training, less 'attitude' please, we are in this together!

Who knows, maybe if certain people had listened more and scoffed less, we would still be able to celebrate together with a glass of Cold-Filtered Heineken?

Or maybe not.

Cheers anyway and thanks for listening.

Pic of glasses
raised

END