

Incentive
Today

news analysis

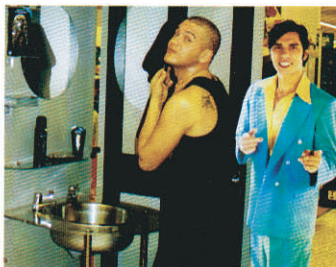
SAMPLING GETS SEXY

Recent months have seen a new lease of life for sampling, reports **Jo Ellsworth**, with innovative techniques being applied to promote a wide variety of products and brands.

Bare-chested male models, floating bottles and girls on roller-skates are currently provoking "shock and delight" amongst consumers in retail outlets up and down the country. These are the raw materials of a new breed of sampling campaign. As brands fight for market share in an increasingly saturated retail marketplace, theatrical techniques are being employed to promote everything from perfume to cleaning products.

Between September and October last year shoppers visiting 130 supermarkets in the UK were surprised to find scantily clad men shaving in mock bathrooms. The models were demonstrating the new Triple Blade razor from Lynx, in a campaign which Anna Mason, senior account manager at ID – the agency responsible – claims succeeded in, "creating a real buzz around the brand." She explains the challenge was, "to re-create the intimacy of a guy's 'getting ready to go out' ritual."

Another notable sampling initiative this year was run by Asda, through The Marketing Store, and was also aimed at building brand loyalty. Last summer, the supermarket chain ran drive-in movies at selected outlets, whilst roller-skate shod field staff provided complimentary snacks from sponsors Pepsi and Doritos. Domestos also signed up to promote its new wipes, employing an aptly



The Lynx campaign – developed by ID – put scantily clad men in supermarkets across the country.

named "clean-up crew" to clean car windscreens.

More recently, Guinness used magic to sample its new Draught in a Bottle product for the November launch. Magic Management developed the campaign, training field staff to perform Guinness related effects and magically distribute sampling vouchers at 100 bars and clubs around the UK.

Innovation is essential

This apparent increase in sampling creativity demonstrates its potential to build brands and generate product interest in a competitive environment. But most experts agree innovative and eye-catching techniques are essential if you aim to maximise the success of sampling programmes. James Freedman, director of Magic Management, says traditional sampling techniques will struggle to have an impact in what he describes as "the video and TV population."

Such campaigns are "ignoring the realities of today's marketplace," says Russell Green, client services director of sampling agency FMCG. For sampling to be effective, activity must, "engage the consumer. It is no longer enough just to chuck a packet of crisps in their hand and say 'new flavour hope you like it' – in these cases there's no real relationship between the consumer and the product."

Freedman of Magic Management says many sampling campaigns also lack relevance with the brand – a factor which his agency is always anxious to focus on. "There would be no point hiring 40 something's to promote Coca Cola to youth, you need young people with the right image."

Timing is everything

Catching the audience at the right time is also critical. In a sampling campaign for energy drink Berocca, FMCG approached their young aspirational target on their way to work. Green says, "It's less about where the consumer goes to shop



Magic Management staff performed tricks to promote the relaunch of Coke's traditional packaging.

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and more about catching them at the right time in their day."

In Green's view theatrical techniques can even reverse the tendency of consumers to under-value a product that is being given away. By creating an atmosphere the consumer finds appealing rather than intimidating he says, "the theatre works to create a high perceived value".

There is clearly a wave of optimism amongst agencies specialising in sampling, which is typified by Green. "Agencies have recognised the opportunities presented by sampling, and we will see an uplift in campaigns."

The new techniques being employed by the more progressive agencies have done much to raise the profile of sampling as a promotional marketing mechanism, and cut through consumer antipathy. However, with consumers becoming more media-savvy on an almost daily basis, agencies must work hard to keep their techniques from becoming passé, thereby undermining their effectiveness. For example, the Lynx Triple Blade stands undoubtedly stood out in supermarkets this Autumn, but had they been surrounded by similar theatrical style stands, promoting other products, they might have been ignored. Agencies, therefore, must keep their eye on innovation and consumer trends if they want to stay ahead of the game. ■