

Getting to know the youth market

Emma Rees, kae: marketing intelligence, shows why you have to get up close and personal, or even down and dirty, to do effective youth research

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PICTURE THE SCENE. It is 2am and your local nightclub is in full swing. Lights swaying, noises deafening, walls sweating, and it is so packed that you can't tell if people are dancing or just trying to stay upright. It is an average Friday night.

Now picture the average member of a marketing department. Late forties, balding, neatly dressed in a faded grey suit, he is slightly overweight and wears a perpetually earnest expression. He is most comfortable in the far corner of the office, pecking at a keyboard and making the occasional phone call.

Put the two together. Your bewildered victim blinks into the lights, nervously bouncing from one foot to the other in what he hopes might be the right rhythm. He ventures into the maelstrom, tapping anything that appears to be an arm and enquiring if he might, perhaps, have a little word about this rather exciting new product?

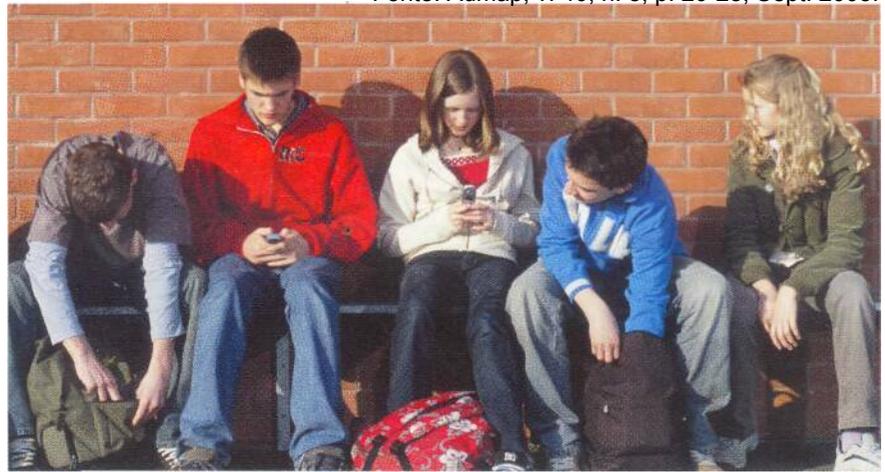
It is difficult to picture. But this is exactly what marketing teams across the country are asked to do every day. The gulf between marketing and the 'youth' generation can seem unbridgeable. It is only by stepping back a little from our nightclub, and looking at the problem in the cold light of day, that we might find a way forward.

There are three important questions involved in any analysis of the youth market.

1. Is it valid to refer to a group of people as 'youth': are there important differences between those we label youth and those we don't?
2. Is youth homogeneous, or are there significant varieties of young person?
3. How is the behaviour of youth today different from that of previous generations?

Different from others - who are the youth?

The dividing line between adult and youth is hard to draw - many fall into both categories. Where, for example,



would you put a mother, buying nappies and pushchairs? Adult, probably, yet 35% of 25 year olds have at least one child (i). There are, of course, reliable differences between adult and youth: indeed, being different from adults is a key aim of being 'young'. Each generation finds some way to define itself as separate, and different, from the previous one. The visible manifestations of rebellion alter: put a teddy boy, a punk and a goth in a line together to get some idea of the differences. But the underlying motivations are the same. Many of the reliable differences are biological: a higher sex drive, greater physical strength. Some are attitudinal: young people are likely to be more idealistic, more rebellious, more risk-taking and more experience-led.

But even with these differences, it is impossible to draw a fixed line between 'youth' and 'adult' segments: something many marketers attempt to do by defining their target market as, say, 16-24. Do advertisers using this criterion expect a 24 year old to put away childish things as 25 strikes, and switch from a carefree existence to a life of responsibility and toil?

And defining a target segment by age risks another pitfall: that of lumping together a wide spread of segments. How can a recent immigrant, say, be expected to identify with, or share aims and role

models with, a product of generations of local farmers? The different roles played by classmates even within the same school or university place gulfs between them that even the most determined marketer struggles to bridge.

Different from the past - today's youth

'Where is the surfer?' gushes a slide from a recent youth marketing conference. 'On top of the wave? Inside the wave? He is both, and knows how and when to flow between the two.'

Is 'Generation Y' an entirely different animal for marketers to get to grips with? A consumer endowed with superhuman levels of knowledge and abilities? Far from it. *Hooligan*, by Geoffrey Pearson, charts the establishment's opinion of 'youth 20 years ago, 40 years ago, all the way back to pre-Victorian times - and each generation earnestly believed that youth in their day had radically changed (for the worse, of course) since their own childhood. There is little more reason to believe this today than there was then. As Reverend E Irving put it in 1829, 'From this relaxation of parental discipline ... doth it come to pass that children who have been brought up within these 30 years, have nothing like the same reverence and submission to their parents.'

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So marketers face essentially the same battle they always have. The things that define youth - rebelliousness, risk-taking, impulsiveness, idealism - are no different from when marketing was born. Today's teenager has the same dreams, ideals and aims as any teenager, since long before the word was coined. The differences are in the ways that youth can express those dreams.

Technology has facilitated this difference in expression. Communication has undergone a revolution in the last ten years, with the internet and mobile phones approaching ubiquity. A youth may well have ongoing contact with a close friend throughout the day - by phone, text, email, instant messaging - however far apart they actually are. The speed with which an opinion - or a campaign - can spread is unprecedented. Some observers have over reacted to the novelty, believing that a common-or-garden mob can be made into a 'smart' mob simply by adding a sprinkle of the latest technology, or that a crowd equipped with texts can bring down the President of the Philippines in a way radically different from, say, a crowd equipped with a phone (2). But, even after the hype is removed, the increased speed and breadth of communication does require a different approach from marketing.

Methods of reaching consumers, too, have broadened considerably: they now include the internet, television, mobile, and vastly higher levels of ambient marketing - even lunchtime sandwich bags are splashed with ads alongside the mustard stains. But, as is frequently pointed out, this increased range of options carries a challenge: in a world of multiple media usage how can a TV ad pull the consumer's attention away from the internet or magazine they are also reading? How can one brand shout louder than the thousands of others to which their target is exposed every day?

Meeting the challenge

Some prescriptions for youth marketing follow clearly from the symptoms already described. Consumers today are used to a far faster and more involved level of communication with their peers, and can respond well to a similar involvement with selected brands. A company that makes itself available to speak to its customers on their terms will strengthen its brand considerably. Innocent Drinks, for example, puts a number on each bottle that rings the 'banana phone' in its office, answered by any passing employee from the top down. Started in 1998, Innocent has 41% of the UK smoothie and yoghurt

drinks market, and has won several marketing awards with its approachable, friendly style. Where a brand does not make it easy for customers to contact it, methods may be created for it: FaxY-ourMP.com has enjoyed huge success simply by making it possible for people to get in touch with politicians.

Bad news travels fast - and, usually, to the internet. Searching for most large companies on Google turns up a host of sites with gripes against the brand. For every PandG.com there is a PandGKills.com, for each PayPal.com a PayPalSucks.com. (Even HooverSucks.com claims to be 'under construction', although that is perhaps less of a criticism.) The internet forces a new level of transparency onto companies, and young consumers are embracing the change. Sites have sprung up that follow every step of an industry in painstaking detail - look, for example, at SnackSpot.org.uk - meaning that many consumers will be as aware of competitor products as the companies selling to them. All of this is entirely user-generated content, and the availability of online journals (blogs) or radio shows (podcasting) blurs the line further between an authoritative source and a customer with a gripe. This is equally true in non-retail marketing - the depth of political detail available at Public Whip.org.uk or TheyWorkForYou.com, both non-commercial sites, far exceeds more traditional news sources. Even the rise of the 'open source' movement, which prohibits secrecy in software programs, reflects this trend.

It is therefore vital that a company is fast to respond to good news and bad - and, when there is bad news, the response must include acknowledging a problem, fixing it, and taking clear and public steps to make sure it does not recur. Every company selling to youth must be in close touch with its customers and know exactly who those customers are. The wealth of user-generated content both creates this need and helps meet it: the opinions >



Innocent Drinks: the 'banana phone' allows consumers to feel connected to the brand

and suggestions found on blogs, user forums and even on 'sucks' sites can be a strong leading indicator of wider public dissent.

Being in 'close touch' with customers is difficult for most large companies, which tend to be run by people closer in age to a youth's grandparents than to the youth themselves. There is a heavy risk of appearing patronising or trying too hard to connect with young consumers. Aping the slang of the target segment, for example, is fraught with danger. Youth language changes rapidly, precisely for the purpose of identifying an 'in-group': those who can speak the language (3) (see urbandictionary.com for a sample of the dizzying range of slang in use).

A company that tries, and fails, to speak to customers in their own language is in danger of appearing to mock the culture of the very people it is trying to please. And even lucky companies that manage to connect with the mood of youth at a certain time - for example, Levi's in the 1980s - will then find it difficult to keep up to date as their rebellious generation morphs into the establishment. In general, it can be safer for large companies to position themselves as an enabler of youth activities, rather than a companion - sponsoring events relevant to the target segment, for example - rather than putting their own employees on a surfboard.

Essential conflict

Some observers would say that 'youth marketing' contains an essential conflict: if the general aim of youth is to define themselves against the previous generation, how can that generation hope to bend them towards their aims? For example, with the current emphasis on individuality over generic, mass-produced items (a trend Mintel labelled the 'Rebellious Consumer' (4)), how can a large corporation convince people of the value of its products?

Part of the answer lies in traditional but underused tools of marketing: segmentation and research. Consumers who are approached simply because they happen to fall into a set age or income bracket will feel no attachment to the brand presented to them, but consumers approached in a way that resonates with how they view themselves are far more likely to respond. To generate this level of understanding, however, brands must research their target market intensively - and update regularly to stay current.

Research, then, is crucial - but this

'Consumers approached in a way that resonates with how they view themselves are far more likely to respond'

does not mean that companies are limited to the old ways of doing it. Focus groups and shopping-centre questionnaires can be useful, but technology offers (and youth culture permits) a vastly extended research toolbox. At the extreme, we have successfully conducted focus groups in UK nightclubs, although with younger facilitators than in our earlier example.

Some companies aim to appeal to segments through sub-brands. Mars, for example, manages very popular mass-market brands such as Uncle Ben's, but also sells an organic, luxury brand of pasta, sauces and soup called Seeds of Change. Few people would study the jars closely enough to identify the connection with Mars, and Seeds of Change is selling extremely successfully with a 'small-company' positioning. Of course, if taken to extremes, there is a strong danger of this strategy backfiring: hell hath no boycotts like a customer deceived, and any brand whose target market suddenly loses faith in its credentials would certainly struggle.

Young customers are only likely to reject the framework offered to them when they feel their wishes are being ignored - or that companies do not understand their needs. The recent kerfuffle over MP3 downloads is a good example. Customers have proved willing to flout the law by downloading music from peer-to-peer networks, but 'justify' this with the popular belief that the large labels operate a cartel, charging overly high prices and manipulating the charts. Labels to which young consumers feel a closer attachment - many small, indie labels - have been able to take advantage of the MP3 revolution, putting a couple of tracks onto bands' websites for potential fans to download and sample before deciding whether to splash out on the CD.

Given the wide spectrum of attitudes and approaches among the young, it would be naive to expect the anti-corporate 'I-am-an-individual' theme to be ubiquitous. Indeed, there is a strongly pro-capitalist segment among youth. Rap music, for

example, freely embraces capitalism and branding: Puff Daddy and Jay-Z have launched fashion labels, and McDonald's claims that several rappers responded to its offer to 'pay per shout' for the Big Mac.

To approach ardently anti-marketing consumers (a particularly youth-heavy segment), there is also the option of a non-traditional approach. Agnes b, a fashion label, has scorned such everyday methods as catwalk models, advertising and spokespeople; instead, it allows people to 'find' the brand themselves, spreading by word of mouth and a limited amount of delicate marketing (5). The company produces a magazine called *Point d'Ironie*, sponsors contemporary art, even owns a film production company. Agnes b clothes were worn in *Pulp Fiction*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Hannibal*. This understated approach - an anti-marketing form of marketing - is a fine line to walk but can bring huge benefits: agnes b has 118 stores in ten countries.

Marketing to the new generation of consumers is certainly a challenge - especially when their impulse is to reject anything that seems to be 'marketing'. But that does not rule out all forms of communication, nor does it sound a death knell for large companies. Take, for example, my colleague's housemate, who, at 23, is pushing the bounds of 'youth', but probably still qualifies. When he claimed recently that 'all marketing should be banned', I was taken aback: my current employment depends strongly on marketing's continuing existence. But it turned out that Duncan was perfectly happy with many forms of marketing: special offers, promises kept, good customer service, new and interesting products. He even had a strong attachment to a range of brands (Google, forexample).

What he and many youth consumers dislike is the feeling of being manipulated; the feeling of being pushed down a set route, the feeling of disconnection from a large company. Break down those barriers and the challenge of marketing to the youth consumer dissolves. ■

/ would like to thank Ben Fleming-Williams for his contribution to this article.

1. *Birth Statistics 2003, National Statistics department, www.statistics.gov.uk*
2. www.theregister.co.uk
3. www.xtremainformation.exvn.com
4. www.reports.mintel.com
5. www.brandchannel.com/

emma.rees@kae.com

The power of influence in the youth market

Steve Watkins looks at influential individuals in the youth market and the word-of-mouth benefit they can bring to brands

THREE WORDS THAT everybody is talking about in the industry at the moment are: word of mouth. A recent study conducted by 2cv: research on behalf of ROAR (a media consortium comprising Channel 4, EMAP, the *Guardian* and OMD UK) demonstrates that certain influential individuals can provide a brand or product with an incremental level of word-of-mouth influence. However much you accept the notion that word-of-mouth is the most powerful consumer communication channel overall - more so than advertising, direct marketing and sponsorship - a failure to recognise its contribution to marketing campaigns means that at the very least you have missed a trick or two along the way. Second to this is the concept that by nature some people are just generally more influential than others - I don't think I need to go on...

Putting the two concepts together in a framework might provide brand owners with the ideal route to diffusing new products, shifting more units and generating a positive image for their brand 2cv and ROAR conducted an experiment recently to put to the test our defined influential individuals or 'Opinion Formers'.

2cv had a belief that you could identify such people by several common values that we had noticed over the years during many qualitative research projects involving leading-edge young consumers.

Why is this different? Previous research

FIGURE 2

Number of instances where each type was ahead of the game

	Opinion Formers	Aspirants	Mainstream
'More into' than 15-24s generally for the most obscure (ie bottom 15 artists in awareness terms among 15-24s)	9	5	1
'More into' than 15-24s generally for middle band (ie next 9 artists in awareness terms among 15-24s)	8	1	0
'More into' than 15-24s generally for top band (ie top 5 artists in awareness terms among 15-24s)	0	5	0

has used stereotypes to identify these people by aspects like: what they wore, what magazines they read, artists listened to and which bars they drank in. What is the problem here? It is twofold: first, these are not constant - they change (often very quickly!) over time; second, they often lead you to a certain type of person, ie an aspirational one, and as we will demonstrate later, aspirational types are not necessarily (often not) influential types - even though they claim to be trend-setting within their peer group. We refer to them as Aspirants'.

The values approach gets around these issues. We have found that 'opinion formers' are by nature more:

- > creative
- > participative
- > risk taking

- > inclined to create their own identity
- > likely to show an unusual level of passion within their interests
- > fond of change/novelty.

You could say the antithesis of these are people who just look for entertainment, consume other people's creativity, speculate, want to fit in, accept the ease of mass market and media definition, go where the herd goes, like comfort and stability and do not have to think too much. So who are they? Sadly, the vast majority. We estimate that at least around 65% of 15-24 year olds behave somewhat like this, so we refer to them as the 'Mainstream'.

The experiment

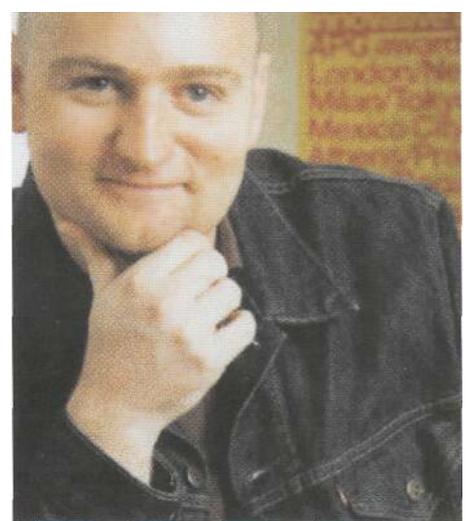
We wanted to see if our defined Opinion Formers actually were more influential and how much more so than the other two types (Aspirants and Mainstream), and if this influenced cross-product categories. We chose new or emerging products in consumer technology, music and fashion categories. For music, we sought advice from music industry experts about artists that were going to emerge in the coming months. With fashion, two new styles of training shoe; and for consumer technology a PDA - this was after weeks of badgering brand owners to find those who would be prepared to give us kit or sell it to us at a discount: many thanks to those that did!

FIGURE 1

Incremental prompted awareness above the control group

	PDA	Trainers	Artist A	Artist B	Artist C	Artist D	Artist E	Average
Opinion Formers	12%	11%	6%	6%	1%	4%	0%	6%
Aspirants	0%	7%	0%	2%	3%	0%	0%	2%
Mainstream	2%	5%	0%	0%	3%	6%	0%	2%

Note: Bold text indicates fastest diffusion, grey bold text indicates diffusion effect, normal text indicates no effect.



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The experiment fundamentally involved measuring the spread of word-of-mouth influence in the friendship groups of our three types. We recruited an even number of 'trend seeds' for the Opinion Former, Aspirant and Mainstream types and then interviewed their respective groups about brand and product awareness in the categories we were researching. In return, we sent the seeds a 'goody' bag full of new kit whose spread we were ultimately going to measure. And, of course, we did not disclose the reason for sending the goods, which were left as a blind 'thank you' for participating. We went back two or three months later to interview their friendship groups again, to ascertain uplift in product and brand awareness. Meanwhile we conducted the same interview among a nationally representative control group, so we could extrapolate market noise effects. The key findings suggest Opinion Formers are very influential in spreading word of mouth.

Of the six products from seven (in total) where a diffusion word-of-mouth effect was identified, we found diffusion involving opinion formers in all cases, across all three product categories. Perhaps more interesting was that among the six cases, the rate of diffusion by opinion formers was greater (often far greater) in four of them and not far behind in the remaining two. These findings are displayed in Figure I.

To be clear, the 'diffusion effect' was determined by comparing the incremental change in prompted product/brand awareness for each group with the control group. For example, for the PDA

FIGURE 4

	PDA	Trainers	Artist A	Artist B	Artist C	Artist D	Artist E	Average
Opinion Formers to mainstream	7%	10%	6%	3%	5%	5%	0%	6%
Aspirants to mainstream	4%	8%	5%	2%	1%	0%	0%	3%
Mainstream to mainstream	3%	3%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%

Note: Bold text indicates fastest diffusion, grey bold text indicates diffusion effect, normal text indicates no effect.

product the incremental change in awareness was 12 percentage points above that of the control group among the Opinion Formers' friendship group.

Opinion Formers are also ahead of the game on picking up new music trends

Part of the study involved using music industry insiders as tipsters, tipping artists likely to emerge in the coming months. We took a list of these and, alongside more mainstream artists, asked a sample of Opinion Formers, Aspirants and Mainstreamers about which they had heard of and which they were into. This was during the early stages of the study. The artists came from across the full spectrum of current styles. We compared the results with the entire sample of 15-245 to determine who was ahead of the game.

The results showed a very interesting pattern. Among the most obscure artists at the time (lowest awareness scores) we

found that the Opinion Formers were ahead in nine out of 15 instances. In the middle range of artist (the next nine artists in awareness terms), we found the Opinion Formers were ahead in eight out of nine instances. In contrast, for the five most popular artists, the Aspirants were ahead in every instance. These findings are summarised in Figure 2.

This last point is interesting because Aspirants are typically identified by their propensity to claim to be ahead of the game, ie those in their peer group who claim to spread trends. Given that in our experiment they were actually the least influential in spreading word of mouth (behind the Mainstream), you can see how way off the mark you can get by trusting claim data alone, and those claiming to be influential.

Opinion Formers do not hang around in exclusive groups: they tend to hang around with the Mainstream and influence them - good news for marketers.

When profiling the friendship groups of the Opinion Formers, Aspirants and Mainstreamers we were interested to find that, contrary to some youth market myths about opinion formers living in isolated 'uber-worlds', in reality they live and mix with more mainstream types. Perhaps in part this goes back to our definition of them.

What is also interesting is that the most homogeneous and 'isolated' group

FIGURE 3

	Opinion Formers	Aspirants	Mainstream
Opinion Formers	83	100	83
Aspirants	81	123	100
Mainstream	109	90	101

'We have generated a way in which we can identify and trap people in and around the youth market who are proven to be more influential in spreading word of mouth to the majority'

is the Aspirants and these are the typology most likely to have been trapped in research in the past when researchers and brand owners were looking for opinion formers or 'style leaders'. They are also by nature the most dependent upon the media for trend cues. Figure 3 shows the indexes for each type and where skews exist.

As well as hanging around in groups containing the Mainstream, opinion formers seem to be particularly influential to them. In fact in our experiment the Opinion Formers diffused trends at a greater rate to the Mainstream than all other types in every single instance. This is demonstrated in Figure 4.

Taking influential individuals and then applying an interest category skew

The next logical step in refining the use of such influential individuals for a practical market situation would be to screen them for interest in the category in question, in effect creating potential early-adopter-Opinion-Formers. It is not difficult to imagine the word-of-mouth power that could be harnessed using such subjects in viral marketing or as brand ambassadors.

In summary

2cv and ROAR have generated a way in which we can identify and trap people in and around the youth market who are proven to be more influential in spreading word of mouth to the majority. This is across a range of product categories, albeit (and this is key) categories requiring some level of interest or emotional involvement. It is unrealistic to assume that the Opinion Formers we have defined would be particularly useful in spreading the word about a new brand of soap powder or chocolate bar. ■

Acknowledgments to ROAR, a media consortium comprising Channel 4, EMAP, the Guardian and OMD UK. www.roar.org.uk.

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Anúncio

How Durex sold sex to a youth audience

How do you go about selling a product that is all about sex? **Simon Buchanan**, McCann-Erickson Communications House, explains how to overcome the challenges

A trawl through the advertising archives over the past 50 years could lead you to the inevitable conclusion: sex sells! And what is more it has been used to sell everything from contact adhesive to chocolate, coffee to cars and bras to beer.

Safe sex?

Using sex is undoubtedly a safe route for brand owners and sometimes the more distant the link between the product being sold and the imagery, then potentially the more impact the campaign has.

However, when your brand is intrinsically linked to sex, using sex to sell your product can prove more challenging. If you are selling condoms, underwear or perfume, you have varying levels of claim on using sexual imagery to promote your product or brand. But there are risks. The greater the claim, the more the consumer expects this kind of image, with the net effect that there is less cut-through.

Creating cut-through against that backdrop when everyone else is using sex, often in a gratuitous way, can be pretty challenging.

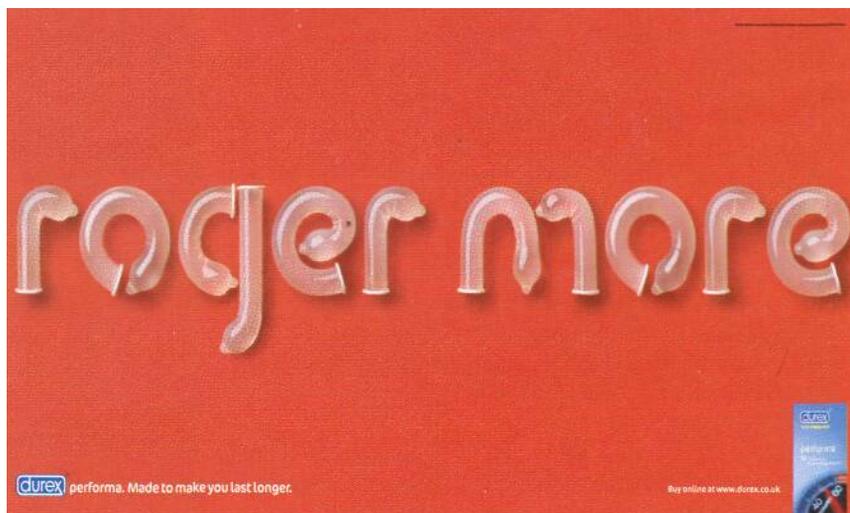
Perhaps, most importantly, you also need to assess whether your product is capable of living up to the claims made in the advertising.

To illustrate the point about creating cut-through while delivering on brand promises, it is worth comparing approaches taken by very different products.

First, let's look at a product with no real claim to sexual imagery.

Britons all know, having been hit with endless TV campaigns, that Cadbury's Flake is the 'crumbliest flakiest chocolate in the world' but who, honestly, would eat it lying in the bath and, more to the point, who in their right mind would actually eat a Flake that slowly?

But in this case, using highly provocative imagery to sell a product you would not immediately associate with sex created real impact. Importantly, despite use of suggestive imagery, the advertising did



Durex: rising to the challenge of selling sex to the youth market

not over-promise - it promised a sensuous experience from eating the chocolate; it was not promising a sexual experience.

At the other end of the spectrum the Opium ads starring model Sophie Dahl represent an extreme approach.

A grey area

Perfume is something of a grey area when it comes to a claim on sexual imagery. Sure, smells can be highly provocative, but asking the consumer to believe that using that particular perfume would result in such a mind-blowing sexual experience proved too provocative for the regulatory authorities. It was, however, both unexpected and gratuitous in its creative approach and became highly memorable, if not infamous, as a result.

But the problems for brand owners don't stop with over-use of sexual imagery in communication. There are hundreds of editorial outlets, from problem pages in the national press to women's magazines looking to take ownership of a wide range of sexual issues to help them sell their publications.

Editorial outlets can own and use sexual issues in a way that a brand owner promoting a product could not.

The overall net effect of advertisers and media outlets using sexual issues and imagery to market their product is to cause consumers to become increasingly desensitised - and what was once seen as being edgy is now just regarded as slightly passe.

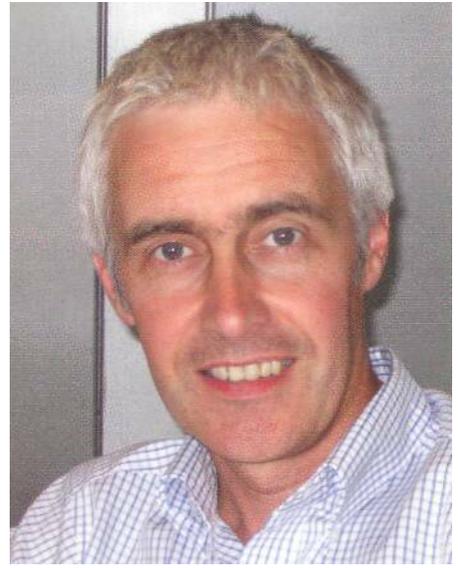
So how do you tackle a seemingly irreconcilable set of issues like this when your product is intrinsically linked to sex? If a brand like Opium is able to make a reasonably legitimate claim to using sexual imagery, then for a brand like Durex it represents the bull's eye. And unlike any of the examples already cited, it represents the ultimate case of the product having to live up to the promise.

Generic brand?

As brands go, Durex has almost become a generic term for a condom in many countries around the world. Brand owner SSL International produces more than one billion condoms every year and sells in more than 150 countries worldwide. The company is the market leader in more than 25 of its markets.

And the challenge faced by a brand like Durex is that while it has consumer

Simon Buchanan is group account director/managing partner at McCann-Erickson Communication House. He has been responsible for the SSL account since 2001, whose stable of brands include Durex and Scholl, and has worked on a number of award-winning campaigns.



permission to use sexual imagery, its use runs the risk of meeting, as opposed to exceeding, consumer expectation, which in turn could mean a lack of impact.

But the problems for Durex do not stop there. Because most consumers would prefer to have sex without a condom, even hinting that a condom could offer the consumer a great or even just a better sexual experience could be seen as a product over-claim and therefore not credible.

It also just so happens that Durex's primary audience (16-24 year olds) is one of the most media and advertising-literate consumer groups, quickly able to spot any product over-claims concealed within clumsy advertising. And as if all of this was not bad enough, the old music hall comedian's gag about 'something for the weekend, sir?' were served only to reinforce perceptions of Durex as an old-fashioned brand.

But the youth market is a key battleground for condom brands because the condom is usually the first choice of contraception for this group. The importance of engaging with the youth market is highlighted when you look at condom usage across life stages (Figure 1).

After the peak in usage among 16-24 year olds, condom usage dips as people enter their mid to late twenties, embark on more stable relationships and choose other forms of contraception - usually the pill becomes the preferred choice of contraception.

Usage peaks again when people hit their thirties and forties, with post-natal women in many cases not wanting to return to the pill, and also when long-term relationships break down and new ones are formed.

Condom usage vs age

Put simply, if you can capture the youth market, you have got a pretty good chance of retaining brand loyalty in the mid to long term.

Faced with these challenges, the Durex marketing team set about developing a long-term growth strategy and identified the following key insights that were felt to be critical to future success.

- > Suggesting that condoms can offer great sex was simply not credible in the eyes of the consumer.
- > Most sexually active adults would choose not to use a condom.

> Any communication had to appeal equally to men and women - around 40% of condoms are bought by women, so use of out-and-out male humour was a non-starter.

> Any product development had to deliver an improved experience for users.

Most of these points could have provided an instructive guide to the development of effective advertising within a category where there is clearly real danger of getting it badly wrong.

But the Durex team felt they had an itch: the problem was that it seemingly could not be scratched. They knew that their consumers would, given a choice, rather not use the product in the first place. Now if this had been an over-the-counter medicine, it could have been rationalised. After all, no one enjoys suffering from a cold or an upset stomach and, when we do, it is comforting to know that we can reach for an effective product to relieve the symptoms or cure the problem. But when your product is intrinsically linked to one of the most pleasurable pastimes known to man, then it is a wholly different ball game.

If, somehow, condoms could be made to offer a better sexual experience, one of the greatest barriers to purchase and usage could be overcome. The advertising could then get on with delivering the message in a clever and engaging way.

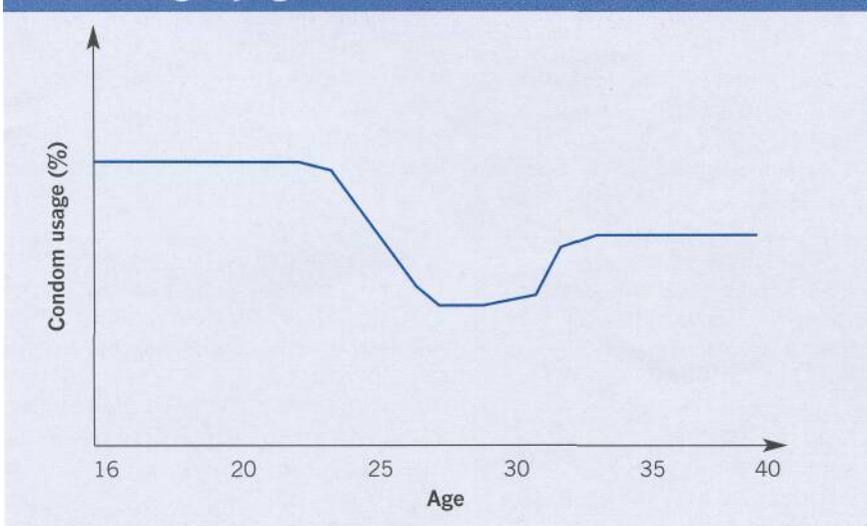
And, as a result, both creative output and product performance would exceed consumer expectations and resonate with the all-important youth market.

An ambitious NPD programme was the key to ensuring the product lived up to its promise.

Test tubes

First stop for the product development programme was an anatomically designed easy-on condom. Condoms up until this point were straight-walled, which means that they looked like a test tube. But most people would accept that men aren't shaped like test tubes. The >

FIGURE 1
Condom usage by age



effect of a condom that is shaped like the thing it is designed to cover means it becomes both easier to put on and more comfortable to wear.

Improving 'donning', as it is known in the trade, is enormously important: it reduces the awkwardness that comes with the fumbling, together with the interruption and possible embarrassment. All of which increases the likelihood that a condom is used in the first place - which is no bad thing when both STIs and unplanned teenage pregnancies are on the increase.

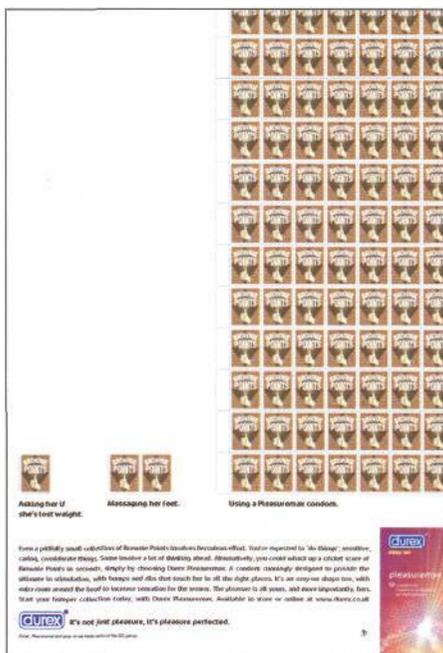
But the innovation did not stop there. Next on the list was the Performa condom, which contains a small amount of topical anaesthetic inside the condom tip. When the condom is worn, the anaesthetic acts to reduce sensitivity and delay climax, thereby improving the overall sexual experience for both partners.

Now all this product innovation meant that for the first time the Durex brand could talk credibly in its advertising about a better sexual experience. But the Durex logo acts like a beacon: it says that condoms have one use - sex (with the possible exception of cocaine smuggling!). So while the portrayal of copulating couples enjoying the raptures of great sex thanks to Durex would have been a legitimate way for the brand to express itself, it would always run the risk of failing to engage with its primary audience. So the creative presented the primary product benefit in a humorous and engaging way.

Other developments have included



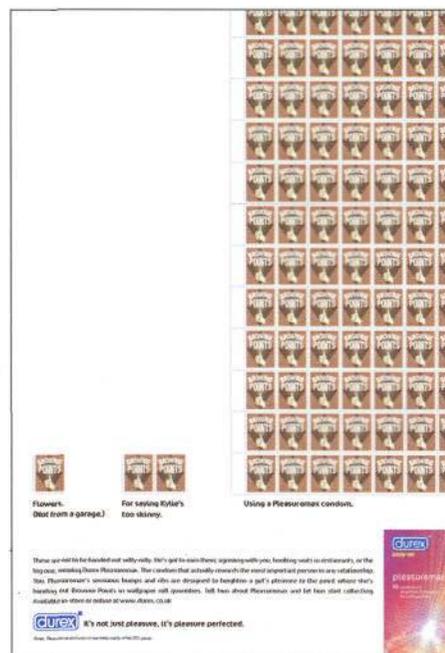
Durex's easy-on condom: an innovative design targeting young users



Durex's Pleasuremax campaign: inspired by the insight that couples trade brownie points

the launch of the Pleasuremax condom, designed to enhance the experience through the use of cleverly designed ribs and dots.

In this case the creative reflected the well-known insight that couples trade brownie points - 'yes you can go out with the boys this weekend if you pick my mum up from the airport next week'. Insight, knowledge of the product, an appreciation of the audience, combined with the confidence that comes from knowing that the product would live up to the promise, enabled the creative to take a less than obvious route, with enormous success.



Play

The recent launch of a range of Durex Play personal massagers brought with it a new set of challenges. So while Ann Summers has taken sexual aids out of anonymous brown bags in Soho sex shops and onto the high street, it seemed that media owners and the regulatory authorities alike were not prepared to be as enlightened.

So the approach was to acknowledge the problem head on.

In each of the specific examples cited, the strategy was to get the product performance right and then use that performance in advertising in an unexpected way designed to engage with the audience.

It is clear that using sexual imagery in advertising has proved a cornerstone for the industry and it is here to stay in the future, but the challenges faced by those looking to use such imagery will continue to evolve as consumer behaviour changes.

At the present moment, if you have a legitimate claim on such imagery, you need to stake your claim in an original and insightful way.

And, importantly, you need to ensure you have cracked the virtuous circle of making sure your product delivers before you start making claims that may exceed expectations but fall down if the performance is not matched by the promise. Particularly when you are talking about man's favourite pastime.

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