

TITLE OF CASE STUDY: “Welcome to Wholesome” Natural Cheese Campaign

Cracker Barrel is one of Kraft Canada's largest businesses. It was not being advertised, was being treated as a commodity, and the equity of the brand was declining in both awareness and relevance. The marketing and research team went on a journey of consumer understanding, including choosing the target, understanding fertile positioning and messaging areas and testing & tracking creative executions. This teamwork led to outstanding creative and breakthrough market performance that re-built the Cracker Barrel brand equity and engagement and set the foundation for future communication and business growth.

Business Situation:

Cracker Barrel's future looked dire: low brand health, aggressive price competitors in a commodity category coupled with “the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression”

The cheese market was dominated by four main players, Cracker Barrel, Black Diamond, Saputo, and Private Label brands. Price competition at the cheese shelf was fierce. Low brand loyalty and brand switching (based on whichever was on deal) was the norm. And then the “greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression” struck. Shoppers became even more price-sensitive, and changed their purchasing habits as a result: close to half were trading down from National Brands like Cracker Barrel to Private Labels (Retail Forward, 2008).

If that wasn't enough, the cheese category itself had become a sea of sameness. Generic and formulaic packaging and formats fostered associations with “commercial” and “convenience” rather than individual brands that are “special.” There was no perceived reason why a consumer would choose one brand over another — in their own words, “they are all still cheddar cheese.” We needed to change this perception.

But there was yet another problem: unaided brand awareness of Cracker Barrel — a long-standing and seemingly well-known brand — was extremely low. Purchase consideration also lagged. And we weren't exactly helping the cause: over the last 15 years, communications had focused on selling varieties and SKUs, rather than selling the brand. As a result, consumers had forgotten what Cracker Barrel stood for.

Summary of Marketing Objectives, Programs and Budget:

Cracker Barrel needed to stand for something more than a generic block of cheese

- The overall marketing objective was to improve overall brand health and equity including increased loyalty to Cracker Barrel among current users who switch between Cracker Barrel and other mainstream cheese brands.

Our mission was clear: in order to build a basis for sustainable business growth during this volatile period, we needed to give our *brand* a greater role in the purchase decision process. On **March 16, 2009**, the brand would make its return to national television (excluding Quebec) with the launch of the first TV spot of a new campaign.

(1) The core business objective of the campaign was to generate a *double digit lift in baseline sales in the 6 months following its launch*, a target that would have been considered a great success amid the throes of the “Great Recession.”

(2) Other key measures that we were looking to make an impact on included the *buy-rate* and *share-of-requirement* for block cheese (which would indicate an increase in brand loyalty), both a challenge in a category dominated by promotions and switching.

(3) We also aimed to *increase the household penetration of our additional SKUs* (i.e. slices), which would be a difficult task with shoppers on auto-pilot at the shelf.

Programs: TV and Print.

Budget : \$3MM for the national campaign (excluding Quebec) .

Our campaign objective was a re-invigoration of the Cracker Barrel brand in Canada

RESEARCH STORY:

Levering the right brand assets with consumers for a “Wholesome” match



1. We started with a basic understanding of our consumer to help us understand her relationship with brands, our product, and her life values.

After mining the PMB data (syndicated data, that includes fundamental brand and category usage information), we defined our consumer as “The Brand Central Consumer.” They’re very conscious of brands, viewing them as indicators of quality and reassurance. These consumers (women) are the “mother-knows-best” types, the kind of people who view the role of authority and “experts” as particularly influential. They’re also very traditional: nothing is more important to them than sitting down with their family for dinner.

Cracker Barrel also was a wholesome brand: 50 years of craftsmanship and traditional icons like a horse and carriage. But consumers couldn’t identify with this old-fashioned imagery – viewing the brand as “an old farmer with a hat.” To them, the brand was no longer relevant. **We needed to bring Cracker Barrel into the 21st Century and position it for sustainable growth.** The team needed to better understand what “positioning” areas would be most fruitful for the brand.

2. Identifying the Most Optimal Positioning for Cracker Barrel = Wholesome

The Cracker Barrel team conducted exploratory research to understand the Cracker Barrel consumer and the category. A total of three, 2.5-hour Hazelton Group Opportunity Labs were conducted with medium/frequent block cheese consumers on May 6-7, 2008 in Toronto.

Several key consumer insights emerged:

- ◆ Consumers had a strong connection with the cheese category both functionally and emotionally, but not necessarily with the Cracker Barrel brand.
- ◆ “Pure, Natural, Wholesome” was the strongest strategic territory for Cracker Barrel.

After the consumer and positioning assessment, the team felt more clarity was needed to understand the specific messaging that would most strongly and persuasively support Cracker Barrel's "Pure, Natural, Wholesome" positioning.

3. Identifying the most compelling support messaging for "Wholesome"

Given that there were many different attributes/benefits that could have been used to support the wholesome brand positioning, a BASES Optimal Benefit Combination Research was conducted. It found that:

- **The combination of three claims "No artificial preservatives, no antibiotics and no growth hormones" most differentiated Cracker Barrel from competitive brands, and were on trend.**

With all these consistent findings, the next step was to identify the most engaging creative articulation of the advertising strategy.

4. Optimizing the Creative Articulation upfront = Outstanding Copy Test Scores

The Cracker Barrel team tested four creative concepts qualitatively through a series of four focus groups Dec 2008 in Toronto. Two groups with block cheese brand switchers and two groups with Cracker Barrel Loyalists.

The "Restaurant" 30 second creative concept was the most engaging and relatable with strong messaging of wholesome and trust. The tagline "Welcome to Wholesome, Welcome to Cracker Barrel" was better received by Loyalists as it is in keeping with the heritage they know.

Millward Brown (MB) copy testing was also conducted on the final finished "Restaurant" ad. Relative to MB database, the ad's strong message communication, top 1% enjoyment scores, top 5% new information scores and exceptional brand linkages drove this ad to be the strongest Canadian ad ever tested by Kraft Canada -- well exceeding all MB norms for breakthrough (AI) and Persuasion for established brands.

Campaign Description

Communication Strategy

The strategy was to bridge the gap between our consumer target and the brand.

We needed to portray a product that they could trust and have faith in. But we also needed to portray a brand they could connect with, one that's wholesome, authentic, and traditional – but modern at the same time. That's because a product attribute like wholesome doesn't differentiate Cracker Barrel on its own, but Cracker Barrel's wholesome personality does. Our job was to bring that personality to life.

Campaign Target:

As stated, syndicated data confirmed our target to be "Brand Central Consumers" and provided us with specific psychographics upon which to draw upon. Further to this, we had demographic and purchase information to provide us with the ability to hone our media and messaging targeting even further. Our target was women 35-49, suburban white collar professionals with 2+ kids and high income (>\$75K). They lead hectic lives and were very outdoorsy (skating, skiing, jogging, biking, boating)

Media Description

The “Welcome to Wholesome” campaign was anchored by equity television with tactical print support focusing on a specific sub-segment or supporting the reasons to believe (no antibiotics, no preservatives, no artificial growth hormones).

TV: The campaign launched with one 30 second execution “Restaurant”, which aired nationally in English only from March 16, 2009- October 10, 2009. On December 27, 2009, a new 30 second execution, “Girl Next Door”, also aired nationally through December 2010.

Print: In June of 2009, a full page print ad, “Slices” was placed in What’s Cooking Canada with a refresh of the creative in the Holiday period (“Milk Bottle”).

Key Executional Elements

There were two main executional challenges:

- 1) building the brand personality and image relevant to our target. After all, we wanted to bring to life wholesome 2009, not wholesome 1964. Out went imagery of farmers, old-timers, beards, and banjos. In went tradition, family values, and purity.
- 2) finding the right and engaging voice. Cracker Barrel’s wholesomeness isn’t direct, loud, or aggressive; it’s comfortable, familiar, and welcoming.

We arrived at the idea of “Welcome to Wholesome.” Our audience be invited to Cracker Barrel’s vision of what a wholesome place is simply a location, but a “way of life,” so to speak. It’s a place children are safe and carefree. It’s a place where the cheese is natural, and trustworthy. Finally, it’s a place where wholesome values and buckets of smiles are the norm. The TV spots that produced helped to bring this world to life in a meaningful, yet way.



would — not where pure, family were modern

The first 30 second TV spot of the “Welcome to Wholesome” campaign, which launched on March 16, 2009, was called “Restaurant”.

Print was used more tactically: to raise awareness of the brand’s additional product lines like natural cheese slices. “Welcome to Wholesome” succeeded by defining Cracker Barrel’s take on what wholesome means for the audience, the product, and the brand. It oozes family values and tradition. It conveys natural, pure, and good-for-you. It exudes friendliness and authenticity. But most importantly, it connects both facts and feelings. “Welcome to Wholesome” is Cracker Barrel.

Business Results

Cracker Barrel has seen outstanding results since we launched the campaign back in March 2009¹:

¹ **Business Results Period (Consecutive Months):** March 2009 – August 2009 (6 mos.)

Start of Advertising/Communication Effort: March 16, 2009

Base Period for Comparison: September 2008 – February 2009 (6 mos.)

The campaign had a significant impact on Cracker Barrel business health metrics:

Shift in Brand Perceptions

Ad awareness for Cracker Barrel rose double digits post-air and purchase intent grew significantly. The shift in Cracker Barrel's brand perceptions helps explain this: attributes like "high quality", "wholesome" and "trustworthiness" all saw substantial increases.

Outstanding Business Results

(1) Despite the recession, Cracker Barrel's **baseline sales grew 50% more than the business objective in the 6 months following the launch of the campaign**. This helped the brand achieve strong **market share growth**.

(2) During the same period, Cracker Barrel over-achieved its **buy rate objective** by 12%.

In addition, the **share-of-requirements increased** both exceeding expectations and indicating an increase in brand loyalty amid a price-driven category.

(3) The **percent of Canadian household that purchase Cracker Barrel also grew significantly**.

The "Welcome to Wholesome" campaign has clearly restored Cracker Barrel's business results and brand health – all done in a way that respected and celebrated both the consumer and the brand. Now that's "Wholesome".