

Campaign Title: Climb On

Brand: Coors Light

Company(s) Involved: MillerCoors, 72 and Sunny, Initiative, Redscout

Category: New Audiences

Marketing Challenge

After five years of significant growth to become the number two beer in America, Coors Light began to experience declines in both drinker penetration and sales volume by mid-2013. Digging deeper into the issues, three themes emerged that needed to be addressed in order to restore the brand's equity:

- In a world where design and details matter, we had created a fragmented, dated and undifferentiated brand world.
- There was a singular focus on a functional attribute that didn't ladder up to a clear benefit and lacked emotional resonance.
- There was an over reliance on one cohort – males aged 21-27 – and to make matters worse, we turned our back on women and siloed our multi-cultural audiences.

The easy, instinctual response would have been to try to recapture the success of the past by reverting to previous marketing tactics, but we knew that in order to modernize our brand we had to think about beer marketing in a new way.

For years, one of the main criticisms of beer advertising was that it tended to either objectify women or disregard them entirely. "Big Beer" marketers tended to focus on appealing to a 21+ male audience they knew consistently drank beer, and often neglected to worry about anyone else. By representing a version of masculinity that was outdated and unappealing, we had done a poor job of recruiting new drinkers. Furthermore, all the big brands were talking over one another – talking to the same audience in the same way with the same propositions. We knew we had to make a major shift in marketing in order to see a major shift in results.

Methodology

Our research methodology was twofold, utilizing a quantitative opportunity analysis followed by a qualitative deep dive into that opportunity group.

With an understanding that we needed to make some major shifts in the marketing focus of our brands, we conducted a large-scale brand segmentation in order to uncover the growth opportunities of each brand. Larger, more mature brands like Coors Light were believed to be saturated yet still fighting for first place, so we needed to uncover new avenues for growth. This segmentation allowed us to see where our brands were currently winning, and where they had the right to win in the future. For Coors Light, the opportunity became obvious.

Women make up a huge, mostly untapped opportunity for beer, consuming more than 17 billion servings of beer in 2014. But that number is actually a decline from a decade ago, indicating that women are leaving the category. Coors Light, however, was seeing improvements with female drinkers, and had an opportunity to grow its success with them even more by engaging them in marketing.

In partnership with Redscout, MillerCoors began a company-wide initiative, led by the Coors Light brand, designed to reimagine the role women play when it comes to beer in the hopes of getting rid of old-fashioned, sexist advertising and inviting women back into the world of beer. That includes changing how beer consumers are thought of, how they're marketed to, and how to create a beer culture as open to women and it is for men.

We chose a qualitative, ethnographic research approach where we could go deep inside the lives of these women so we could uncover what motivates and energizes them in beer and in life. We spoke to different women spanning a variety of ages, ethnicities, incomes, industries, and sexual orientations via live online video interviews, had them record consumer journals, and we traveled to their homes to spend time with them.

Through all of this research we learned a lot about women. But the most revealing insight was what we learned about women AND men. Gender roles are flattening out. Men and women want similar things from brands. Modern drinkers want modern versions of masculinity and femininity reflected back to them. This meant that the best way to reach women would also happen to be the best way to reach men: by focusing on both genders, on positive yet challenging experiences, and finding a higher purpose for Coors Light as the brand that celebrates the climb and provides a refreshing reward. Ultimately, our research not only uncovered a new audience (women), but also a new way to talk to our existing audience (men), as well as a new way to talk about the brand, which we were able to develop into our new campaign.

Creative Execution

We worked with creative agency 72 and Sunny and media agency Initiative to develop and launch Coors Light's *Climb On* campaign. This was Coors Light's first campaign designed to appeal to both men and women in a way that our past advertising had not. Furthermore, while most beer brands continue to speak to younger legal-drinking-age male consumers, this campaign was designed to appeal not only to women, but also the 35+ segment. The campaign features a series of ads showing men and women conquering personal goals like a marathon or a rodeo, or a female chef working hard all day before enjoying a Coors Light with her staff. The narrator asks, "What would we be without our mountains?" – a question intended to evoke a sense of empowerment not often felt in beer ads. This is a significant and welcomed departure from previous advertising.

The campaign is about more than just beer – it's also about striving for your goals and overcoming obstacles, which is something people of any gender can relate to. And as we learned from our research, finding common ground and a higher purpose was something that would enhance our marketing efforts across the board. Coors Light's role within the campaign, as it is within their lives, becomes clear: that of the refreshing reward. This allows the characters in the ads to serve as our heroes and the beer as their reward for conquering one challenge and preparing them for the next.

The campaign launched in January 2016 with a plethora of creative elements, utilizing TV, print, out-of-home, digital, and social in order to gain broader reach. It also utilized less traditional methods such as 360-degree video and virtual reality to drive home the idea of overcoming new challenges.

Business Results

Coors Light's *Climb On* campaign proved to be its most successful campaign in years. *Climb On* improved branded ad awareness over the brand's prior campaign among its new 35+ target. Furthermore, brand penetration of consumers, particularly among 35+ females, saw growth for the first time in years. Overall perceptions of the brand improved as well. The percentage of people who say they would "take Coors Light to a party" shot up during the start of the campaign run, and has been steadily increasing ever since. The campaign has also helped to preserve Coors Light's standing as the most refreshing beer, as the percentage of people who describe the brand as "refreshing" has also increased consistently since the campaign started airing.

The campaign has shown an immediate and meaningful impact on sales as well. February 2016, one month after the campaign launched, saw the highest YoY sales growth the brand had seen in a single month in several years. Through October 2016, the brand has experienced consistent YoY sales growth.

Our segmentation and ethnography efforts allowed Coors Light to think and act differently about returning to growth and finding new consumers. There are a lot of negative stereotypes out there about beer marketing, but Coors Light took a stand to be part of the solution, and proved that taking a strategic approach to going against the norm could be the right decision for business, as well as for evolving what marketing in the category could be. Beer may continue to be considered a "manly" drink, but Coors Light has shown that it's a drink for anybody who tackles challenges head-on and believes they deserve a refreshing reward for doing so – no matter their gender.