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Crest's "Pro" Strategy to Return to the Top

by Bethany Klett

How does a toothpaste manufacturer outperform the competition to become the number one selling brand again? This was the problem facing Procter and Gamble's Crest toothpaste in 1998, when rival Colgate released its Total brand toothpaste and became the leader in toothpaste sales (Neff, "Lucky Seven?"). In an attempt to improve sales, Procter and Gamble hired Diane Dietz to be the new brand manager of Crest in 1998 (Neff, "Crest Pro-Health"). Dietz worked with Procter and Gamble to develop a new brand of toothpaste: Crest Pro-Health. The "blockbuster proposition" of this toothpaste brand is that it is the only one approved by the American Dental Association to combat all seven of the most important oral-care problems (Neff, "Lucky Seven?"). Crest's new product hit stores on August 7, 2006, accompanied by a 100 million dollar marketing campaign led by Publicis Groupe's Saatchi & Saatchi and Starcom Media Vest Group (Neff, "Crest Pro-Health"). One ad in the later part of this campaign was featured in the May 2009 issue of Redbook magazine to promote Pro-Health Enamel Shield toothpaste. In addition to successfully selling toothpaste, this ad suggests something positive about the role of family in today's society. This full-page ad for Crest Pro-Health Enamel Shield toothpaste effectively uses phrases, simple images, and color to inform readers of an oral-health problem and then provide a solution for that problem, while also providing a solution to Crest's larger financial problems.

In eye-catching blue letters that cover the upper two-thirds of this ad, Crest proclaims to consumers that "Everyday food and drink acids can cause irreversible loss of your tooth enamel." With this statement, Crest alerts consumers to an oral-health issue of which they may not have been previously aware. Beneath these large-print words, Crest presents a solution to the new-found problem: Crest Pro-Health Enamel Shield toothpaste. This toothpaste is pictured underneath the text, as if it were coming to

the rescue to save consumers' tooth enamel. This is exactly what Crest wants consumers to believe: they must use Pro-Health toothpaste to save their enamel or it will be lost forever. Fourteen letters in the main sentence of the ad are replaced by images of various foods. For example, coffee beans are neatly arranged to take the place of a "C," a bunch of grapes replaces a "V," an upside-down pear replaces a "Y," and an orange is used instead of an "O." This variety of common foods used as letters prompts readers to consider the many foods they eat everyday that could be damaging their teeth. This makes enamel loss seem like a pressing issue, made worse every day by foods and drinks like coffee and fruit. The ad's use of the word "irreversible" conveys the gravity and permanence of enamel loss. Printed in bold, this word makes it clear that once enamel is lost, consumers will not be able to get it back. The words used in this ad were carefully chosen to portray Pro-Health toothpaste as a necessary solution to enamel loss.

The American Dental Association's endorsement of Pro-Health Enamel Shield toothpaste helped establish that this product is the best solution for enamel loss. This toothpaste is the only one that the American Dental Association accepts to treat the seven most important oral-health issues at the same time: cavities, gingivitis, tartar, sensitivity, stains, plaque, and bad breath. This endorsement is very important for consumers and Crest emphasized it throughout its marketing campaign. In an article in Advertising Age, Matt Barresi, Procter and Gamble's marketing director of oral care in North America, stated that consumers are "going to see us focus on what's really most relevant to the consumer, which is that they can get everything at the same time. It's not just a litany of minor things. They're the things dentists and the American Dental Association care about" (Neff, "Lucky Seven?"). While the American Dental Association endorsement is not explicitly expressed in this 2009 ad, the background and lighting conditions remind consumers of the important endorsement emphasized earlier in the campaign. The ad has a light blue background which becomes nearly white towards the center. The packaging of Pro-Health Enamel Shield toothpaste shown in the ad is a similar but darker shade of blue. Towards the top of the packaging on a nearly-white background is a light blue

caduceus, the symbol of the medical and dental professions. The large, nearly-white region of the main part of the advertisement draws the consumer's attention to the caduceus on the image of the product. This serves to remind consumers of the American Dental Association's endorsement of Crest's Pro-Health toothpaste that was stressed in the earlier ads of the Pro-Health marketing campaign.

This ad for Crest Pro-Health Enamel Shield toothpaste proved to be significant because, as one component of the 100 million dollar Pro-Health marketing campaign, it had a positive impact on Crest's sales figures. In an effort to "leapfrog rival Colgate Total's performance and return Crest to toothpaste leadership," Crest invested a large amount of time and significant resources into the development of its Pro-Health toothpaste (Neff, "Lucky seven?"). Procter and Gamble even postponed the release of its Pro-Health toothpaste for over a year to perfect its packaging and advertising. Crest brand manager Dietz reiterated the work that went into this ad campaign when she said, "We knew this launch could not be good--it had to be great" (Neff, "Crest Pro-Health"). The launch of Crest's Pro-Health toothpaste proved to be great because, according to a Morgan Stanley report, consumers "who had seen Pro-Health ads were 40-50% more likely to buy it" and almost half the consumers who tried this new product "said they would definitely buy it again" (Von Hoffman). Furthermore, this study showed that two-thirds of Pro-Health consumers previously bought non-Crest products, like rival Colgate Total (Von Hoffman). The Pro-Health ad campaign was successful in improving Crest's falling sales figures.

This ad is also significant because its methods suggest something positive about today's society. In this ad for Crest Pro-Health Enamel Shield toothpaste, Crest uses fear marketing and a simple design to appeal to the maternal instincts of Redbook magazine readers. Redbook magazine describes itself as the "total-life guide for every woman blazing her own path through adulthood," with mothers comprising 43.5 percent of this magazine's readership ("Redbook Media Kit"). Prior to seeing this ad, most people are probably not concerned about their tooth enamel. The text of the ad raises awareness of the significance of

enamel loss with the use of fear marketing. The ad's fear marketing appeals to maternal instincts by encouraging women to worry about their tooth enamel and that of their family members. The overly simple, almost child-like design of the ad also draws on maternal instincts by prompting women to consider the negative effects that the healthy foods shown in the ad have on their children's teeth. Crest's marketing strategy of prompting women to protect their teeth and the teeth of the family members reflects one of Redbook magazine's overall goals. According to its media kit, Redbook magazine aims to "give [readers] the tools they need to take care of not just their own health, but their entire family's, too." The success of Crest's appeal to maternal instincts suggests that women really are concerned about the wellbeing of their families, particularly their children. This is reassuring in a time when family bonds seem to be losing importance in an increasingly busy society.

This ad, part of a larger marketing campaign, provided a solution to consumers' problem of enamel loss, and in turn helped provide a solution to Crest's own business problems. The ad uses a combination of text, images, and color to create a problem for consumers (enamel loss) and then provide a solution (Crest Pro-Health Enamel Shield toothpaste). Subsequently, the Pro-Health marketing campaign improved Crest's sales figures, allowing it to "become the leading U.S. toothpaste brand again" (Neff, "Crest Pro-Health").

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