

Case study

New tactics to revitalise a brand
 Gillette's 'Shave India Movement'



The story. While Procter & Gamble's Gillette safety razors have become the dominant brand in nearly every developed market, sales of its flagship product – the three-blade Mach3 – in India were disappointing.

Yet there was a huge potential market in India, where most of the 400m-plus men of shaving age used double-edge razors. By 2008, years of traditional marketing had failed to increase sales of Gillette razors. Sharat Verma, brand manager for Gillette India, decided it needed to adopt radical new tactics to expand its 20 per cent market share in the razor category.

The challenge. Mr Verma's team assessed that 80 per cent of men in India who shaved were using a traditional double-edged razor, a technology so ingrained that cuts and razor burn were considered a part of everyday life. Also, men were generally shaving less: from Bollywood celebrities to IT consultants, the designer-stubble look was spreading. It seemed consumers were unaware of Gillette's promise of a clean, smooth shave, did not believe it, or simply did not care.

Pricing and distribution were also factors. The Mach3 was up to 50 times the price of a double-edge blade, which deterred men from trying the brand for the first time.

Gillette products such as the Mach3 were sold through licensed, registered retailers, but these were small in number and concentrated in more affluent urban areas. The difficulty was getting into the 12m small independents that made up 95 per cent or so of India's retailers, largely in rural areas.

The strategy. Gillette needed products that appealed both to the urban elite and the rural poor to persuade a significant number of men to adopt the brand. The Mach3 would target more affluent consumers, but the retail price had to be realigned to no more than three times the cost of a double-edged razor. To do this, Gillette India cut manufacturing costs by paring down the components, except the all-important blades.

Gillette also needed a separate, more affordable razor to appeal to those at "the bottom of the pyramid" – the mass market of consumers on low incomes. The result was the Gillette Guard, designed with emerging market consumers' needs in mind, addressing factors such as lack of running

water and affordability. It aimed for a razor system that sold for 33 cents and replacement blade cartridges that sold for 8 cents. This would make it equivalent to the cost of using a double-edged razor.

Packaging was reduced to lower costs and make it easier for small vendors to stock the items. Gillette also organised wholesalers to deliver to small retailers.

However, what really caught the public's imagination was an innovative marketing campaign, the Shave India Movement, featuring infomercials, social media and stunts such as a world record for shaving.

It began in 2009 when Gillette publicised a study showing that 77 per cent of women in India preferred clean-shaven men. This was followed with a campaign, "India votes: to shave or not", that generated media buzz in urban areas. In 2010 Gillette sponsored "Women Against Lazy

20%
Gillette India's share of the razor market in 2008

500%
Jump in Mach3 sales in eight weeks in 2010

Stubble". The media carried opinion polls and featured clips in which female celebrities condemned stubble. Debates raged on Facebook. In eight weeks Gillette's sales of the Mach3 increased by 500 per cent and market share for razors reached 40 per cent.

The success of the campaign led to a spin-off in the US: after Gillette's "Kiss and Tell" campaign in February 2013 reported that women preferred kissing clean-shaven men, the debate went viral.

By 2013 the Gillette Guard accounted for two out of three razors sold in India.

The lessons. Word-of-mouth campaigns influence opinion at all levels of society at low cost.

With the right product, big profits can be derived from the bottom of the pyramid.

Finally, skills learnt in devising campaigns in developing markets can be applied in developed ones.

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