

Front and center

► Slim-Fast's 'channel agnostic' approach to marketing gives PR a chance to take a leading role. *David Ward reports*

In mid 2006, the key marketing executives for Unilever's Slim-Fast weight loss brand began to notice a new mindset developing among its target audience of women in their 30s and 40s.

"During that summer we did a lot of in-depth work with consumers trying to unlock a deeper understanding of their challenges and the role that Slim-Fast could play in that," explains Virginia Blake West, brand development director for Slim-Fast North America. "The challenge of losing weight is daunting on the surface. We kept hearing from consumers that the weight-loss industry is filled with lots of false promises and they were fed up with hearing all of it."

Determined to show women it understood how difficult and discouraging dieting could be, Slim-Fast worked with its advertising agency, Ogilvy & Mather, to develop the message, "Find Your Slim," an invitation to consumers to set a realistic weight goal and achieve it through its product.

"Women were tired of hearing that if you're not a size 2, then there's something wrong with you," Blake West adds. "So our message was that we understood that and this was an invitation to them to get to a weight that is realistic and right for them."

Blake West and her team quickly realized that it was going to take more than TV spots to deliver this compelling message. "Within Unilever we have a pretty rigorous internal process called Integrated

Brand Communication (IBC)," she says. "Included in that right up front is that when you have a brand idea like 'Find Your Slim' you immediately start thinking about how that might be [carried] out across multiple channels."

In the past, such a process would have pitted various internal teams – as well as outside ad and PR agencies – against one another, as they clamored to be the one to carry that message to consumers.

But Slim-Fast is among the growing number of consumer brands taking a more "channel agnostic" view when it comes to marketing their products, which often means a larger role for PR in integrated campaigns.

"We knew establishing television advertising would be important because historically the brand has been built on TV advertising,"



One of the initial tasks for the PR team working on the "Find Your Slim" campaign was to select the right spokesperson, supermodel Rachel Hunter

Blake West says. "But we also realized we could really bring it to life through PR because the timing seemed right."

Part of the reason for the heightened role for PR was the emergence of a backlash in both the fashion industry and the public against stick-figure models.

"In PR we always look for what is going on in culture so that we can tap into what the press is writing about," notes Therese Caruso, EVP for strategy and planning at Ogilvy Public Relations. "At end of 2006, Spain's Fashion Week

banned models size 0 and 2, and then *Cosmopolitan* banned models smaller than size 8 and we thought, 'Wow this is just starting to gain headway here and we can take the messaging of 'Find Your Slim' and really adapt it to what we're hearing.'"

Even as the television ads for "Find Your Slim" were hitting the airwaves in early 2007, Ogilvy was working with Blake West on how to use PR to amplify that message. Both sides quickly realized that first and foremost in that effort would be coming up with right spokesperson for the campaign.

Ultimately, the team chose supermodel Rachel Hunter, which Blake West says worked on a number of levels. "Rachel had always been a model who embraced a more realistic body type," she says. "But she also could talk sincerely about her experiences, the pressures of the industry, and people who expected her to be a different type of model, yet she stayed true to who she was."

The choice of Hunter also helped Ogilvy broaden its reach beyond the traditional women's magazines and reach 30- to

45-year-old women – wherever they might be.

"The women's books are very important in the weight-loss field; women do turn to women's magazines to get advice and also to be inspired by other real-life women who have lost weight," Caruso says. "So it was getting in *Woman's Day*, but also getting in the entertainment media because today women 30 to 45 are reading *OK!* and *People* magazine."

Hunter also played a major role when Slim-Fast and Ogilvy began leveraging new media for their messaging through a partnership with iVillage.

"We actually learned from our consumers that social networking is something they do value," Blake West notes. "So on iVillage we had a forum whether Rachel Hunter could invite consumers to 'find their slim' along with her and where consumers could chat with each other. That proved to be very powerful because these women want to feel like they're doing it on their own, but they also want the support and guidance to succeed."

The first PR wave in June culminated with a major story in *People* on Hunter and "Find Your Slim," and a *Today* appearance by Hunter on back-to-back days. In September, Ogilvy kicked off the second wave when it chose 10 women from hundreds who logged onto Slimfast.com and iVillage to 'find their slim.'

"These were women of all different sizes, from size 4 to size 12, and they all worked with Rachel Hunter to find their slim," Caruso says. Earlier this year, those women were part of a "Style Your Slim" runway event in LA featuring the designs of *Project Runway* season 2 winner Chloe Dao. Hunter served as MC and Bravo TV star Tim Gunn also appeared, bringing in an ample amount of media coverage.

"Find Your Slim" secured great media hits during every PR stage, but Caruso stresses, "Our metrics were different for this campaign because our clients set the metrics differently. It wasn't about the numbers and how many impressions you got; it was about, 'How can we get this message out in a meaningful way so that women can understand it, and what are the outlets women really go to for advice?'"

It certainly helped that both the advertising and PR agencies were under the same Ogilvy umbrella. But Blake West stresses one of the keys to any multi-channel campaign is to have all agency partners check their egos at the door.

"You need the discipline of going through an integrated brand communication process to figure out what goals you want to achieve," she says. "Once you do that, you have a much better understanding of what are the best channels to reach your bull's-eye target, and that means you'll have better planning downstream." ■

BENEFITS OF A CHANNEL AGNOSTIC STRATEGY

Amplification of key brand messages

Advertising can get initial messages to a targeted audience, but PR can tie those messages back to real-world trends

More flexibility

By using multiple channels, marketers can take the feedback from an initial campaign and organically tweak messages and tactics

Campaign extension

Leveraging PR on top of advertising can take the messages from a three-month television buy and turn them into a 12-month campaign, through media stories, blogs, and contests

Two-way communication

Using new media in addition to traditional advertising and PR can help contribute in brand messages

