

“got milk?” From Memorable to Motivational

How research helped re-focus one of America’s most visible advertising campaigns



‘got milk?’ Ten years ago, the answer might have been, “not as much as we used to.” In fact, up until the 1990s, the milk industry had been experiencing a 30-year declining trend in per capita consumption. In response, The Milk Processor Education Program (MilkPEP) was established.

MilkPEP is a “check-off” program authorized by an act of Congress in 1990 and funded by the nation’s dairy processors to provide a competitive “marketing voice” to an industry whose products are traditionally sold as a commodity. The marketing charge was to educate consumers about the benefits of drinking milk in order to increase consumption.

Responding to this challenge, MilkPEP developed the famed “milk mustache” celebrity print ads. The first ad launched in 1995 and was quickly followed by a succession of others all touting the functional health benefits of milk (strong bones, height, etc.) While the ads were extremely successful in driving awareness and quickly became a fixture of popular culture, MilkPEP was not seeing consistent increases in consumption.

In late 2001, MilkPEP undertook a quest to explore a new positioning based on “higher order” benefits or “emotional connections” that would motivate target audiences to drink more milk. Their search for a research firm with experience in values-based communications led them to engage WirthlinWorldwide® (now Harris Interactive).

Harris Interactive provided MilkPEP with the research-driven strategic insights to reposition themselves to consumers. Due to the complex nature of the full repositioning for each of Milk’s consumer segments and various products and sales channels, this case study provides insight on how it made the weight loss TV campaign more relevant to women that are 25-49 years of age, effectively driving purchase and increasing consumption.

Positioning Research

Beginning in 2002, MilkPEP, advertising agency Lowe Worldwide and Harris Interactive embarked upon a multi-phased research program over the course of a year to identify the consumer decision-making paradigm for selecting healthy beverages in multiple contexts and settings. This decision-making paradigm was explored using Harris Interactive’s expertise in Means-End theory to clarify how the functional dimensions of milk as a product are psychologically related to consumers’ motivating emotions and personal values.

While decision-making pathways for white milk, flavored milk, bottled water, carbonated soft drinks, fruit juices, and sport drinks were all explored to varying extents and in selected competitive contexts (in-home vs. out-of-home, meal time vs. snack time), our focus was on understanding, and effectively delivering, a competitive positioning for white milk.

As a result of this research, the strategic positioning emphasized the linkages between essential and natural nutrients in milk that ultimately provide a sense of health and vitality and self-esteem sought after by consumers when selecting a healthy beverage. Below is a more detailed review of how this positioning was developed.

Phase One: Triad discussion groups with youth, mothers, and adult women.

Lowes Worldwide developed six potential positioning concepts to better communicate the emotional benefits of drinking milk. Harris Interactive conducted triads with target audiences to carefully probe and listen to consumers discuss why milk was or was not important to them and how the different concepts affected them. The research showed that three of the six concepts succeeded in linking beverage choice to personal values, but a more specific understanding of which constructs were tied to which personal values was needed to develop a strategic framework that would explicitly and clearly deliver these motivating messages. With this mandate, the foundational strategic work for phases two and three was commissioned.

Phase Two: In-depth one-on-one VISTA interviews with teens, mothers, and adult women.

Harris Interactive used a semi-structured “laddering” interview approach to allow respondents to articulate their cognitive and emotional experiences in making choices to drink healthy beverages and milk specifically. Five distinct approaches to this decision emerged, with a health paradigm, driven by a sense of self esteem and, to a lesser extent, a sense of longevity, as the dominant decision pathway that consistently motivates consumers to drink milk.

Phase Three: In-person interviews with teens, mothers and adult women.

In order to quantify the relative prevalence of decision-making patterns among the target audience, a structured quantitative survey among 537 respondents was used to explore consumers’ need states for in-home meals and snacks as well as out-of-home occasions. Individuals were asked to identify the recent occasions where they had made a beverage choice from among the pre-identified competitive set and rate the importance of multiple factors driving their choice in different settings and contexts. Respondents then rated the performance of white milk and chocolate milk on these same factors. Strategic analysis confirmed and sharpened the VISTA findings.

Breakthrough Science

Coincidental with the above research, MilkPEP and a related dairy marketing organization, Dairy Management Inc, had developed new scientific knowledge about the weight loss and weight management benefits of milk consumption. This new and exciting benefit was the result of more than eight years of academic and scientific research on a wide variety of strategic subjects. These efforts came together in late 2002 to provide sufficient support for a new, credible, and important consumer message which was creatively translated to: Milk Your Diet – Lose Weight.

Although Lowes Worldwide was working to revise advertising and creative strategies based on the new values-based positioning in most elements of the campaign, the first TV ad to support this new finding on weight loss was developed almost exclusively to communicate the new science, and the functional benefit of weight loss and how milk can help. It also introduced the “skinny glass” visual concept, but it did not take advantage of the more emotional strategic positioning of white milk that had been uncovered through the research. An early example of the television advertising targeted to women age 25-49 that focused on the weight loss benefit of milk is referenced to the right.



Original functional based weight loss television ad.



Phase Four: Weight loss values-based positioning of white milk, using in-person ad assessment.

With the decision by MilkPEP to pursue a long-term commitment to the weight loss campaign, Harris Interactive was asked to integrate the values-based positioning of white milk and the new weight loss science.

Harris Interactive used an assessment methodology designed to determine how well a Vista-based strategy is communicated in an ad, to identify areas for improvement and to determine the affects or desired attitudinal and behavioral goals. Harris Interactive used this methodology to conduct a strategic assessment of the first ad and several animatics of new ads designed to better reflect the values-based positioning of white milk. This in-person, computer-aided methodology allowed the detailed assessment of the existing and potential ads, in terms of how well ideas and message elements were being communicated and how well they were being linked to one another. In addition to numeric assessment, the research included more than a dozen open-end probes. Approximately 90 women ages 25-49 viewed each ad.

One potential ad emerged as strong and consistently on strategy, as it tied in the functional benefits of milk as well as focusing on the emotive benefits. It scored highest on helping respondents understand how milk can contribute to weight loss and making them likely to drink more milk.

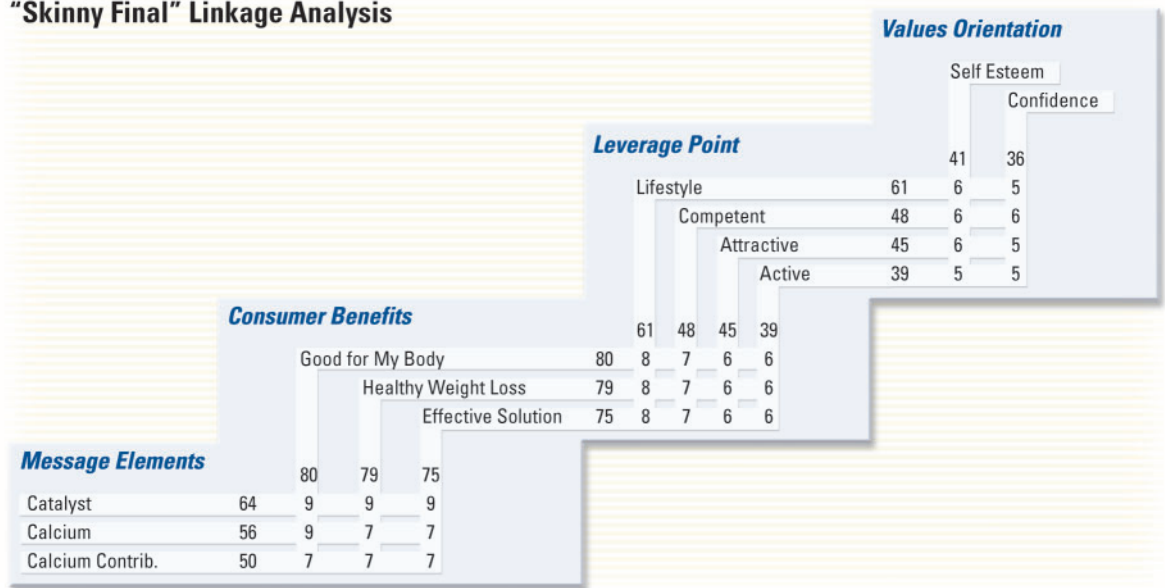
The strata assessment yielded a wealth of valuable insights:

1. **Affect Scores.** The bottom line of a successful ad is whether it changes attitudes and behavior. Compared to a wide variety of ads Harris Interactive has tested in many categories, this ad received some of the highest affect scores ever, on statements such as “this ad makes me believe that drinking milk can help me lose weight,” “this ad makes me feel that milk is for someone like me,” and “this ad makes me really want to drink more milk.”
2. **Communication Effectiveness** measures how effectively an ad creates the functional to emotional linkages mapped out by the values-based strategy. As shown in the graph below, this ad scored very well on both key dimensions:
 - How well each specific idea is communicated to the viewer (scale of 0-100, where 0=not at all, 60=somewhat, 100= perfectly).
 - How well ideas at different levels within the means-end framework are linked to one another (scale of 1-9, where 1=weak, 5=strong, 9=perfect).
 - The scores related to the Milk ad are provided below.
3. **Executional Framework Scores.** This ad also scored well on measures of attention-getting and impact, including “this ad tells me something new about milk that I didn’t know before,” “this ad makes me want to find out more,” and “this ad makes me want to tell a friend about what I have seen.”

The scores of this execution not only exceeded historical experiences of ads that perform well in market but also significantly outpaced the original TV ad developed without the values-based positioning, especially at the more emotional levels. Across the various elements measured, the scores of the new emotional and functional based ads increased from the original functional based weight loss ads between 13% - 115%.

Linkage scores show even stronger improvement comparing the emotional ad to the original functional ad, with scores increasing between 13% and 50%.

“Skinny Final” Linkage Analysis



Based on these findings and insights from the qualitative probes, Harris Interactive worked with Lowe Worldwide to further enhance the final production ad. There were five critical elements of the new advertisement that drove home its success:

1. Milk itself was prominently visible and consistently present in the ad.
2. The messages and visuals of women drinking milk were consistent with the consumption contexts and intuitive beliefs the audience has about the benefits of milk.
3. The “new information” about weight loss was credibly portrayed as an expansion of the already widely held belief that milk is good for you, with a scientific basis and a moderate tone that did not sensationalize the weight issues nor open the door for milk to be a “fad diet.”
4. The morphing of a cylindrical glass into one with curves was effective and the strategic assessment of the advertising identified the ad concept of “Skinny Glass Woman” as the most powerful ad concept for influencing consumers to drink milk.
5. The research helped reveal the importance of communicating weight loss in a very positive light. While humor is often an effective device to deliver a message, research helped us understand that the intensely personal nature of weight loss makes humor extremely polarizing and therefore problematic.

The final television ad which includes both the functional and emotive benefits is referenced to the right.

Jonathan Lange, Senior Vice President at Lowe Worldwide stated, “Harris Interactive deepened our understanding of exactly how the “skinny glass” milk icon made an impact on women. The research showed that the glass symbolized much more than “getting thinner.” It cued “healthy weight loss, a healthy figure, the shape I’d want to be, positive and good weight loss” among others. The research also revealed that the glass device helped avoid personal comparisons to the figures of actresses in the commercial. Harris helped us fully realize that it was more than a rational cue – it was a symbol that was inspiring and indicating healthy weight loss.”



Final functional and emotive based weight loss television ad.

White Milk Weight Loss Positioning



The research also uncovered the benefit of overtly reminding women of the inherent goodness of milk. Underscoring what they already know about milk helped moms accept the new information about weight loss. The team used everything we had learned to develop a more formal statement that adapted the values-based positioning strategy specific to the weight loss benefit. A secondary decision-making paradigm with more relative emphasis on the appearance dimensions of health and accompanying self-esteem benefits was integrated with the core strategy to provide the weight loss framework within the Means-End approach.

With the new positioning strategy and strata assessment, Lowe Worldwide launched a national ad campaign for Milk that included:

- TV commercials launched on national TV. 1,500 TRPs across Network, cable and syndication. Two versions of “Skinny Glass Woman” debuted in January 2005 and aired in rotation through December.
- Message integration with a 5-minute segment on ABC’s “the View” and edit sponsorships on WebMD.
- Integration of the “skinny glass” icon across marketing disciplines, such as in-store point of sale materials, Hispanic media and PR efforts.

Results

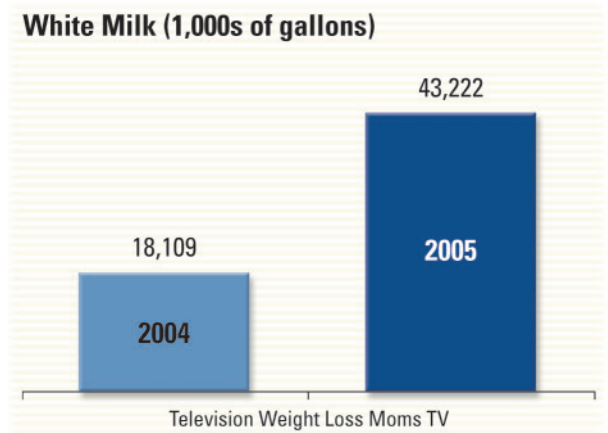
This shift in positioning, from weight loss as a functional attribute of drinking milk, to appealing to the higher order emotional benefits relating to being healthy (increased a sense of longevity and feeling good about yourself), has had a significant and measurable impact on both attitudes and behaviors among that target audience.

Attitudinal Change (Tracking Data)

1. Recall of the milk and weight loss link among adult females has nearly doubled from 41% in 2004 to 78% in 2006
2. Among women there was a significant increase in the perception of “weight loss” as a primary attribute for milk. In 2006, 47% of women agreed that milk can be an important part of a weight loss diet, compared to 24% in 2004.

Behavior Change (Market Data)

1. The industry has seen consumption increase most among its weight loss target audience. Weekly consumption among women age 25-49 rose 9.4% from 2004 to 2005 according to TNS-NFO Share of Intake Panel data.
2. It was determined in MilkPEP’s advertising tracker conducted by DDW, that the reasons women drank more milk were primarily “Trying to lose weight” and “Trying to be healthier.”
3. MilkPEP was able to ascertain through marketing mix modeling conducted by Marketing Management Analytics (MMA) that the volume sales per dollar of TV advertising grew from 1.38 gallons in 2004, to 2.5 gallons per dollar spent in 2005.
4. According to MMA, while messages in a variety of media contributed to the success of the weight loss campaign, the television advertising generated the steepest increase in sales volume (25 million gallons) of any single component.
5. Among all milk products, the lesser fat milk products have seen the most sales growth as a result of the campaign, while whole milk and flavored milks have not been negatively affected.



Organizational Change

The milk category is vast, consisting of multiple products, occasions, target audiences, and sales and delivery channels. Achieving this level of measurable success, for a category this large is a tremendous undertaking and accomplishment. So much so in fact, that the MilkPEP board has allocated a redirection in current and future funding to further invest in this newly positioned weight loss messaging through the television advertising channel. MilkPEP will be shifting its marketing mix, increasing its television advertising that utilizes the higher order benefits messaging by over 20% in 2007.