Dos Equis:

“The Most Interesting Man in the World” Campaign

Renee’ LeBouef

University of South Carolina
In the year 2006, there were 261 beer brands vying for the attention of consumers. The spending in this product category exceeded $1 billion (Isbhat, 2009). There may have not been a more competitive market than beer. Among this vast group of competitors was Dos Equis, a Mexican beer brand unknown outside of the southwestern United States. Texas and California were the only states purchasing the brand, which was certainly not enough to drive the kind of brand awareness the company needed in this country. Dos Equis is made by Heineken USA Inc., the nation's premier importer of beer. The company is a subsidiary of Heineken International BV, which is the world's largest international brewer (Heineken). Dos Equis was looking to achieve significant growth in the market, particularly within the import and specialty segments (The Most Interesting Man in the World, 2009).

Unfortunately, Dos Equis was the epitome of a challenge brand. Cutting through the clutter within one of the noisiest market categories would require a campaign of unprecedented proportions. In addition, category growth was declining across the board, from value brands to imports (The Most Interesting Man in the World, 2009). Americans were consuming wine and spirits more frequently than beer. Marketers would have to present Dos Equis in a way that would spark chatter to maximize media dollars. They would have to move beyond the conventional Mexican imagery of white beaches and burritos in order to carve out a distinct identity for the underperforming company. The biggest question, of course, was as follows: Was there a firm out there who was up to the challenge? And, would they succeed?

Havas Worldwide, formerly known as Euro RSCG, is an international integrated marketing communications agency. The company rebranded itself as Havas earlier this year. With 316 offices in 75 countries, Havas is actually one of the largest firms of its kind (Havas Worldwide, n.d.). As an IMC organization, they provide corporate communications, marketing
services, and, of course, advertising, to businesses across the world. The agency boasts an impressive client list, working with the likes of Volvo, Lacoste, Kraft Foods and Air France, to name a few. The company commits itself to being “the most future-focused global ideas agency” (Havas, n.d.). Under this guise, Havas embarked on creating one of the most socially recognized brand ambassadors among young American men today.

The agency designed their Creative Business Ideas planning guide in 2000, which formalized the concept of relying on the “fully integrated creative ideas” necessary for revolutionizing a brand such as Dos Equis (Havas, n.d.). According to Havas Worldwide’s website, these ideas are “capable of altering consumer perceptions.” This is exactly what Havas set out to do when conceptualizing and ultimately executing their “Most Interesting Man in the World” campaign, now a pop culture sensation boasting a plethora of user-generated content. Undoubtedly, they had no idea their efforts would eventually earn Dos Equis the honor of being the sixth best-selling imported beer in the United States (Schultz, 2012).

However, the success of their campaign did not happen overnight. Havas naturally embarked on a journey to compile research. Dos Equis’ target audience, men ages 21 to 34, mentioned frustration and disappointment with the current beer ads on television, in print form and on social media outlets. During a series of focus groups, these men admitted they felt that the numerous advertisements featuring voluptuous women and frothy beer steins were a misrepresentation of their personalities. Beer consumers (not just those within the target audience) felt misunderstood and disliked the cheesy clichés being thrown in their faces. Furthermore, through these findings, Havas discovered two inexplicably valuable truths: “First, what these guys wanted more than anything, more than hot girls and designer toys, was to be seen as interesting. And conversely, that they were terrified of being seen as boring” (Isbhat,
This insight was molded into one dramatic, eye-opening concept: “I would rather be dead than dull.” Just like that, Havas stumbled upon its creative gold mine.

Thanks to a little help from the consumer target, Havas was given the chance to design a campaign that was linked to a clever brand – one that was neither serious nor stupid. While Dos Equis is indeed a Mexican beer, marketers were determined to steer clear of the overdone “beach and bikini” advertisements. They were not looking to highlight the fact that Dos Equis was a Mexican beer; rather, they wanted to focus on the beer's “Mexican-ness,” that sense of adventure and thrill that can come with Dos Equis. Havas identified three crucial keywords for defining the future of their newest campaign: Danger, Adventure, and Exploration.

With this information in mind, the idea behind the campaign was to feature an established, mature gentleman in a series of media outlets (television, print, internet and others.) The world’s most interesting man would be shown performing exciting, risky stunts, enjoying the company of other impressive individuals, and, ultimately, leading a life any young man would envy. The entire campaign would be centered on a humorous approach, including countless one-liners and witticisms. In an effort to avoid the cheesy nature of many similar campaigns, the new face of Dos Equis would not be silly or immature; rather, he would be elusive, mysterious, and, ultimately, someone target audience members would aspire to be like.

Next, marketers needed to find the perfect embodiment of these values to become the face of the campaign. Rather than cast a handsome, younger actor, they decided on an older, more worldly protagonist. The logic behind this decision was the target audience would not "see him as a threat or as a reminder of accomplishments they hadn't achieved yet" (Schultz,
The face of the campaign “needed to be someone to work toward, vs. a mirror of themselves.” For this reason, the world’s most interesting man could not be one of their peers.

Enter Jonathon Goldsmith, a seventy-three year-old former struggling actor. He was chosen by a casting call among hundreds of other hopefuls. Once marketers narrowed down the exact specs of what they were looking for in their leading man, they saw approximately 40 actors in a final round. Goldsmith had the ruggedly handsome look Havas was going for. The dynamic personality was a long-time “journeyman” actor, longing for the true stardom that evaded him for decades (Schultz, 2012). Goldsmith enjoyed brief stunts on popular television shows including Gunsmoke and Bonanza. Until he stepped into that fateful casting call, Goldsmith had yet to enjoy the stardom he had been seeking for years.

Interestingly enough, the self-proclaimed Russian Jew even shares some similarities with the character he plays. Goldsmith says he once saved a girl from drowning and rescued a man caught in a snowstorm. He describes his Dos Equis persona as “every guy’s fantasy,” particularly in a time where chivalry is dead (Schultz, 2012).

Adding to Goldsmith’s attractive sense of mystery is his elusive nature in real life. He does not make public appearances and has never appeared on a television show or in a movie as “The Most Interesting Man.” Heineken’s Vice President of Trade Marketing and Sales Strategy Kheri Holland Tillman says Heineken wants to keep the focus on brand awareness, not character awareness (Schultz, 2012). This is a central component of what drives consumers’ anxiety for the next commercial or ad. Colin Wescott-Pitt, Vice President of Marketing for Dos Equis, says, “It is through careful management of his ‘old school character’ and mindful choices regarding exposure of his legend that we keep our consumers thirsting for the next episode or escapade”
While the brand itself will send out consistent tweets, you’d be hard pressed to find the world’s most interesting man doing so himself; “unless he’s speaking with the birds” (Gutman, 2012). If target audience members – or their girlfriends – are looking to meet Goldsmith, they can always travel to the quiet farmhouse in Vermont where he currently resides.

In April 2007, the first national 30-second commercial advertisement was aired. The film is yellow and grainy, meant to signify the shots were taken in “The Most Interesting Man’s” younger years (CMA Academy). Lines such as “his blood smells like cologne” and footage of Goldsmith arm wrestling with communists paint the perfect picture of a confident, cool individual traveling the world and experiencing all it truly has to offer. This opening segment succeeded in introducing the target audience to the most interesting man in the world; a man in love with women and booze, yet classier than most. The tagline of “I don’t always drink beer, but when I do, I prefer Dos Equis” became the familiar mantra tying all proceeding “Most Interesting Man” commercials together. This, along with the ending line of “Stay thirsty, my friends,” became instantly recognizable phrases among target audience members.

It was quickly inferred that Dos Equis hit the jackpot on emotional attachment by casting Goldsmith. When consumers first got a glimpse of Goldsmith on screen, his incredible persona evoked a sense of longing, mystery and a desire to learn more about this fascinating lifestyle. Target audience members wanted to be just like him. In turn, they wanted to drink the beer he ‘preferred’ – when he was actually drinking it, that is.

The popular, punchy phrases didn’t end with the commercials. Print advertisements boasted the same images of a serious, brooding Goldsmith surrounded by beautiful people and, of course, a glass of Dos Equis. They featured lines such as “Happy hour is the hour after
everyone from happy hour has left.” These appeared in popular men’s magazines such as Sports Illustrated and Maxim. Fans of the “Most Interesting Man” campaign quickly began creating their own “memes” or versions of the print ads, replacing the original text with other, often cheeky, phrases of their own.

In addition to these more traditional forms of media, a highly interactive website was launched to encourage the target audience to develop an even deeper association with the Dos Equis brand. “The Most Interesting Academy” can be accessed at www.mostinterestingacademy.com. Within this site, users have access to “an online hub for knowledge you need that you never knew you needed” (The Most Interesting Academy, n.d.). Need advice on how to create the perfect online dating profile? No problem. Looking to learn the “foundations of flavor” for cooking? Perfect. The options seem endless. Other possibilities include learning insults in languages from around the world or engaging in an arm-wrestling match with a deceased head of state. Through these offerings, it becomes obvious that no aspect of the campaign ever breaks brand character. Each of these “courses” is relevant to “The Most Interesting Man” and what he enjoys doing in his spare time. There is also an “events” section that features a schedule of real-world classes offered in select cities; simply click the drop-down menu and find your location to determine if one is being held in a city near you. This type of peer communication further drove fan interaction and overall brand recognition. Class categories include: culinary, adventure, arts, and, as expected from “The Most Interesting Man,” legendary. Perhaps the most compelling section of the site is the “Stay Thirsty” Grant Contest, which is currently accepting submissions for round two. The program gives one winner $25,000 to “make their most interesting adventure a reality” (The Most Interesting Academy, n.d.). Visitors to the site can view current submissions. The round one winner was selected on October 30, 2012. Neil
Losen, a photographer and filmmaker, was awarded the money to explore the Rwenzori Mountains of Uganda, known as the “Mountains of the Moon.” He hopes to document their majesty, as the glaciers atop these mountains will disappear completely within the next twenty years (The Most Interesting Academy, n.d.).

A separate website, www.staythirtsymyfriends.com, gives users the chance to record their own “toast” – as long as it includes Dos Equis-branded drinks. The homepage features Jonathan Goldsmith reciting a different witty, stone-faced toast each time you visit the site.

In today’s world, social media naturally played a huge role in Dos Equis’ efforts. As a matter of fact, “The Most Interesting Man in the World” made them the first beer in history to reach one million “likes” on Facebook. On the campaign’s page, users can post their own “legend lines.” The original Facebook page has over 300,000 “Likes” and has nearly 2,000 people “talking” about it. Additionally, in a time when sophomoric humor is a staple in the advertising world, Dos Equis capitalized on the opportunity to stand out from the crowd by quenching the consumers’ thirst for intelligent humor (Gutman, 2012). This crucial aspect of the campaign is particularly noticeable within the social media stratosphere. Beneath Goldsmith’s profile picture, it reads: “The Most Interesting Man in the World isn’t here. He saw that the policy commissioner was flashing that spotlight sign over the city again, and then he and his dates left in a hurry. You can probably find him at www.facebook.com/DosEquis” (Facebook).

For a campaign to have sparked two websites and several different Facebook pages, the movement must be huge. With this notoriety comes some kickback, however. An online album containing pictures of the ‘Most Interesting Academy Masquerade Ball,’ held by Dos Equis in New York City in November 2012, is receiving considerable hostility from fans of the Facebook
page. Audience members poke fun at Goldsmith’s age and his seemingly emotionless facial expressions.

YouTube also gives fans the chance to join the “interesting” conversation. Here, the atmosphere seems to be far more humorous. People can upload videos of their own “Most Interesting Man” advertisements, which, of course, are often cultural satires/humorous parodies of the brand itself.

To intensify the efforts of increasing fan interaction and making their lives more interesting, a search was launched to find “The Most Interesting Man’s” new assistant. This was a six-month program launched with the intent of replacing his former right-hand man, who apparently had been killed in the line of duty (The Most Interesting Man in the World, 2009). The search was a competition among brand fans for the coveted position. The winner would also be featured on a 2009 television spot. Since the launch of the Assistant Search, the campaign website’s hits rose 790 percent (The Most Interesting Man in the World, 2009). The search was eventually incorporated into a television show called M.I.A., aired on the MOJO network, a “Video-On-Demand” network owned by Comcast iN Demand Holdings, Inc (Mojo, n.d.). According to the show description via the MOJO website, qualified candidates must “possess a certain sangfroid when dealing with dictators below the equator” (Mojo, 2012). Three chosen contestants were forced to compete in a “weekly battle of wits, stamina, and cunning” (Mojo, 2012). While the search has closed and applications are no longer being accepted, this endeavor furthers proves the campaign’s ability to reach across multiple platforms while staying within brand character.
As a result of the “Most Interesting Man” campaign in its entirety, Dos Equis actually exceeded its goal of double-digit growth. Trial, awareness and consideration increased as well. However, growth within the import and specialty categories remained stagnant and even decreased. Other indicators of success include the number of applications in the Assistant Search; nearly 7,000 fans applied for the coveted role in three months’ time in 2008 (The Most Interesting Man in the World, 2009).

This campaign is a phenomenal example of IMC and is actually the epitome of what its efforts can do for a brand. “The Most Interesting Man in the World” can be seen on television, in print publications, blogs, other digital efforts and point-of-sale platforms. It was promoted across multiple platforms, giving consumers countless options for familiarizing themselves with the world’s most interesting man. Because of this extreme integration, the campaign took on a life of its own. If a target audience member were to mention the words “the most interesting man in the world” to one of his peers, it could almost be guaranteed that he would instantly know who and

“Dos Equis beats category and sub-segment growth rate”
Source: Nielsen, August 2008
what he was referring to. This has held true since the beginning of the campaign and is still the case as new efforts are continuously created. A number of internet “memes” featuring the world’s most interesting man can be found through a quick Google search. (“I don’t always _____, but when I do, I _____.” Insert the user’s humorous personal satire.) This campaign got people talking about the brand; more importantly, they were talking about the brand in a far more positive light than before it was launched. Even though I, personally, am not a fan of Dos Equis, I have enjoyed and admired the entire campaign since its inception over five years ago. I admittedly had never even heard of the brand prior to Jonathan Goldsmith’s dry yet hysterical appearances on my television screen. These increases in brand awareness and brand attitude are huge goals of any IMC campaign. One definition of IMC that was discussed during our first class meetings emphasizes the importance of marketing to the individual by understanding their needs, motivations, attitudes and behaviors (McKeever). Because Dos Equis listened to feedback from their target audience, their campaign was specifically tailored to the aforementioned factors. This was a critical factor in the success of Dos Equis’ efforts within the “Most Interesting Man” movement.

Many lessons can be learned from “The Most Interesting Man in the World” campaign. As previously mentioned, a sincere focus on your target audience and their wants and needs will lend valuable insight to your messaging. The information gained from the focus groups conducted by Havas paved the way for the idea of the world’s most interesting man in its entirety. If the target audience had not revealed their true thoughts regarding the beer advertisements being aired prior to Havas’ efforts, marketers would have had no idea how to construct a campaign that would set them apart from Dos Equis’ countless competitors. This proves that marketers must do their homework before attempting to achieve the kind of success
enjoyed by this campaign. Because “The Most Interesting Man in the World” was fully integrated, it saw a greater rate of success than a less extensive campaign might have. The more campaign elements the target saw, the more their level of consideration for purchasing Dos Equis rose (The Most Interesting Man in the World). This indicates that the integrated nature of the campaign directly influenced its success. Finally, the sincere emphasis on fan interaction made it easy for consumers to develop an intensely personal association with both the brand and “The Most Interesting Man.” Giving them the ability to post their own photos, videos and “legend lines” was a way to capitalize on the social media craze while simultaneously driving fans to talk about the campaign. I believe this was where they truly hit a goldmine, as peer communication can prove to be incredible drivers of brand affinity. That is the beauty of social media.

With new videos currently in the works and a continuously growing fan base, it’s safe to say that “The Most Interesting Man in the World” is a shining example of a successful integrated campaign. Dos Equis was looking to expand their reach among western men, which was considered a lofty goal for a tiny Mexican beer brand. Having inspired contests, television shows, websites, and a multitude of online videos and social media outlets, the campaign’s beloved character sparked an award-winning movement that resonates with fans. “The Most Interesting Man” allowed Dos Equis to both achieve their goals and create a cultural phenomenon.
References


