

CAMPAIGNS: Mint maker courts magazines, stores with media rollout

Sherri Deatherage Green - 19 Jan 2004 00:00

Anthony Shurman was a hotshot executive in the gum-and-mint division of Warner-Lambert when Pfizer bought the company. The entrepreneurial Shurman opted for a severance package, which he used to found Yosha! Enterprises. Shurman had smokers in mind when he developed BB-sized, liquid-filled, zero-calorie, nasal-clearing *Momints*. "Most new products just steal market share," explains Shurman, who instead wanted to increase mint consumption by packaging Momints in a slim dispenser that could slip between a cigarette pack and its wrapper. Shurman surveyed about 500 New Yorkers and began peddling the mints there to independently owned stores before engaging Vorticom. "When I started on my own, I drafted a press release that I sent to some 50 publications," Shurman says. "Not one called me back.... I decided I needed to hire a PR firm."

Strategy: "You don't have to smoke to love these," says Nancy Tamosaitis, president of New York's Vorticom. She envisioned broader appeal for the powerful mints. The general PR campaign served two purposes: gaining trade coverage to attract distributors, and courting the young, hip crowd. Tamosaitis and Shurman wanted to build brand awareness by focusing on *Momints*' effectiveness, their uniqueness against traditional tablet-pressed mints and breath strips, and their attractive look. Vorticom also positioned Shurman as a David-and-Goliath entrepreneur. Where messaging is concerned, "We leverage the pun," Shurman notes.

Tactics: Vorticom targeted several media categories and used success in each to gain the attention of others. Press releases and product samples went to convenience and grocery stores and candy trades, as well as to consumer and lifestyle reporters. As *Momints*' success began to build, the firm successfully pitched Shurman's story to publications like *Entrepreneur* and *Fortune Small Business*. Sampling figured heavily into the campaign. For example, Vorticom sent packets including *Momints* and several competing brands to reporters encouraging them to take the "Mint Strip-Off: Premium Mint Taste Test Challenge." Several ran with the idea, including the *New York Post*, which voted Momints "the most effective mint."

To reach the hip crowd, Vorticom targeted consumer press and included Momints in gift bags for events like the *GQ* Man of the Year and the Sundance Film Awards. The agency also took advantage of reports from customers who discovered that *Momints* enhanced certain sexual acts. Adam Dreyfus, booking producer of *Unscrewed with Martin Sargent* on Tech TV, says he set up an interview with a couple who sang the product's praises. More recently, Shurman was inspired by the movie *Bad Santa* to offer free mints to anyone who could provide bona fide evidence of Santa employment. The press release made popular radio fodder, and garnered brights in a number of publications, including the *Financial Times*.

Results: So far, the product has been picked up and is selling well in the 7-Eleven and CVS chains - developments Vorticom widely publicized. While Shurman had been quite successful in raising capital among friends, the publicity helped bring new funds. "We did raise a fair amount of money in August or so, and there were some people who invested who read about us and contacted us," Shurman says, adding that the clips also come in handy when approaching potential investors.

Future: *Momints* will continue courting celebrity endorsements, chasing ink in consumer magazines, and seeking TV airtime. "The landscape will look totally different for him this time next year," Tamosaitis predicts. "The expectation is that we will be a pretty important player in the market."