

# Continental - Continental rise above the pack

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Source: Account Planning Group Australia, Special Prize, Creative Planning Awards, 2008

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Continental is a meal solutions business, providing quick and easy meals in the form of Side Dishes, Meal Bases, Stocks and Cup a Soups and up against strong competitors. Continental had traditionally adopted a silo-based approach to brand building and communications, which reflected a fragmented presence in store. The solution became to champion family mealtimes and a 360 campaign was launched, petitioning families to pledge to spend more time together. Continental has seen record sales for Side Dishes and a lift in brand scores.

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This is a paper about Planning taking a brand to a higher ground & thereby elevating it from faithful backstop, to leading the charge in a cause dear to our consumers' & society's hearts. In doing so, Planning made a series of brave leaps that

- Produced a unifying campaign for a disparate product portfolio
- Broke radically from the brand's cherished past
- And trumped our competitors' and their positionings by tethering our brand to a social cause, rather than simply to a category or consumer insight

The result is an idea that has enabled Continental to take a far more dynamic & important role in our consumer's lives, by elevating it from a meal solution to a social catalyst through the 'Family Mealtimes Matter' campaign.

## **A BIT OF BACKGROUND**

Continental is a meal solutions business; we provide quick & easy meal wins for mums in the form of Side Dishes, Meal Bases, Stocks & Cup a Soups. We were up against an increasingly strong line-up of aggressive competitors – Masterfoods, Maggi & Campbell's. Continental had traditionally adopted a silo-based approach to brand building & communications, which reflected our fragmented presence in store; this solution spruiked the

individual benefits of our individual products.

## **THE ISSUE**

Our business was performing well but not brilliantly; sales of our meal making products were respectable. There were lingering concerns about the long-term health of the brand given the silo-based approach & limited spend. On top of this the competition were girding their loins with increasingly strong positionings & increased support after a period of disarray. What we needed was to develop a single overarching brand vision, something unifying which would supercharge the Continental brand & fast...

### **A Glorious Past**

We commissioned some depth research to discover where we stood in our consumers' lives (including a household immersion & deprivation study). Through this we discovered a huge reservoir of affection for the Continental brand, built up over years of brand advertising.

Particularly resonant & emotive was the theme of Partnership; the ever-willing partner in the kitchen, summed-up in the line; 'You & Continental, just brilliant'. Mums would talk about us as 'Always there for me', 'Trusty helper' & 'Good enough for my mum & good enough for me', etc. All good, most people would have thought it just a case of 'back to the future'...

### **The Dark Side of Partnership**

However despite these huge positives, some things concerned us:

'Partner' seemed great; we're a brand in lockstep with our consumer. However, the more we probed, the more potential downside emerged. The Continental brand had a tendency to be seen as a fall back option; this 'assistant' role made us feel a passive, rather than dynamic part of the cooking & home-making process. It was easy for consumers to see us as the fallback option; in the back of the cupboard, to be broken into in emergencies only. We could be seen as a guilty secret by mums; devoid of food values or emotional warmth. Cracking open a packet of Continental would be seen as the admission of a 'bad mum'. This Partnership theme also did little for food values; we were great in times of trouble, but actually helping spontaneously to prepare good food? No, not so much...

### **A Subordinate Positioning**

Finally, this Partnership positioning just didn't stack-up against our competitors. They were employing much more heroic, imaginative positionings; Magi with 'Imagine That' & Masterfoods with 'Inspiring Flavour'. These were both big positionings for supposedly 'backstop brands'. We seriously needed to pull our socks up & turn Continental from fallback into inspiration.

### **Raising the Game**

So we knew that we had a big job to do; taking us from faithful partner to higher ground. And crucially, ground that would trump our competitors. We could have settled for finding the white space in the category; how can we be different to other brands? However, we wanted to do something that broke away from them completely. Something that did more than promise more imaginative cooking, or the ability to master ingredients. Something that would take an often overlooked category & brand and embed it in the public consciousness; to make meal solutions seem more than just a prosaic, functional, quick solution. Therefore we decided to go beyond communications to give our brand heart & tap into real social issues in the lives of our consumers, beyond just

the narrow product categories we play in.

## Spreading the Net Wide

For us the trail began, when our interest was pricked by consumers in research bemoaning their busy lives & lack of interface with their families. This finding was echoed in the broadsheets at that time;



So rather than looking to the category for insights, we looked to society at large; from global findings on families, to recent newspaper headlines, to sociologies & nutritionists. We finally and most ambitiously commissioned a renowned sociologist to do a deep dive onto the lives of our MGBs; Dr Rebecca Huntley. This was the first time such a far reaching social report had been commissioned by a food brand in Australia (for further details of this extensive research, please refer to the [Appendix](#)). The deeper we went into the lives of our consumers, the more we realised that meals were a pivotal part of family connection & weren't happening as often as liked or needed...

## STRATEGIC BREAKTHROUGH

From this groundbreaking research we helped derive a truly global social insight; modern life prevents the family from spending as much time together as they used to, due to longer work hours, mobile phones, television, computers, iPods, etc. This reduction in family time also impacts on the number of meals spent together, and across all of the available research there were three critical benefits to be derived from these regular family meals;

1. Improved relationships between family members
2. Improved nutrition and eating habits
3. Improved social behaviour among children

Realising that modern life is increasingly fragmented, and knowing that mealtimes are social glue to keep families together, Continental therefore can act as a catalyst for social cohesion by providing Meal Solutions in the full sense of the word; thus solving one of the great social dilemmas of our time.

Most families agreed that sharing mealtimes helps with communication, education on nutrition, forming bonds & creating rituals within the family, and wished they did it more often. Championing family mealtimes is a powerful social cause which is of huge concern to our consumers globally & in which the Continental brand can play a leading role. As a 'meal solutions' brand we can own the emotional high-ground of the mealtime & fight to protect it for our consumers. Meal solutions aren't dull & functional; they're a gateway to a more enriching emotional experience & solution to one of societies' ills; they have become increasingly important...fundamental. This

strategic breakthrough did everything we asked of it; trumped our competition, broke from the past & turned the Continental brand from follower to leader.

## **THE CREATIVE BRIEF**

### **Proposition – Continental Champions Family Mealtimes**

To bring the importance of the brief to life, we had to go beyond the regular briefing routine. Therefore we took the teams to a family home, filled with mess, noise & colour. We had prepared a meal for 20(!) around a large family dining table, complete with cutlery, crockery & placemats. We cooked-up a storm with Continental products; new Vegiful Cup A Soups to start & Chunky Beef Pie meal base for mains with a pasta Side Dish. During the meal we slowly revealed the brief; who our mums were, what was important to her (family, health & value) and articulated the social issue at the heart of our Brand Cause – that family mealtimes are important to her & declining and that Continental can play a role in championing them.

Over dessert we discussed family mealtimes, the importance of which was agreed by those teams with kids, and they remembered how often they didn't happen. For those teams without kids, our briefing surroundings reminded them of how important family mealtimes were for them growing up. And we all agreed that the time we were spending together around the dinner table was allowing an openness of dialogue which we didn't normally encounter in the somewhat sterile surrounds of an office. This would also be true of families, who use meal times to discuss, connect & bond. This briefing facilitated more discussion, communication & bonding than would be possible in brief, snatched moments in the agency. Not only did this briefing allow us to communicate the brief, it demonstrated the benefit of the brand!

We left this experiential briefing with engaged and motivated creative teams, who believed that they could achieve something beyond advertising – creating a social cause for the nation to rally behind (often a rarity in communication); because Continental can bring families together through mealtimes. Those creatives with families also vowed to have family mealtimes more often: our cause was beginning to have effect...

### **Resulting Work**

Working with the teams we therefore harnessed this global insight & created a cause for the Continental brand to champion – that 'Family Mealtimes Matter'. This elevates Continental beyond being a functional adjunct to meal preparation; we're now positioned at the heart of the family, championing the mealtime occasion & all the social benefits which accrue from it. This social cause also provided the Continental brand with an overarching & organising thought; no longer would we be producing 'bottom-up' communication, based on the benefits of our various products. Rather we would be asking how each of our products facilitates & supports family mealtimes (similarly with new product development). This brief therefore created a unified brand & product campaign around the organising thought & line 'Because Family Mealtimes Matter'.

## **THE CAMPAIGN**

We produced an integrated communication strategy in order to expand the campaign through-the-line. We seeded the social cause with Dr Huntly's newsworthy research at a press launch & maximised the ensuing PR. We then built towards our Brand executions to establish our point of view; this was a 360 campaign which encompassed TV for cause awareness & emotional engagement, Press to reinforce food values & Radio to drive consumption occasions. We also successfully incorporated the launch of a range of new Side Dish variants alongside this brand activity, showing the stretch & flexibility of this big idea to encompass brand and product communication. We finally created a campaign microsite with a petition & pledge for families to spend

more time together; <http://www.continental.com.au/mealtimesmatter>



This resulting work fed straight off our galvanised brief, was truly through-the-line, contained a unifying thought that could stretch to individual products & had a brilliant roll-out a la Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty. None of this would have been possible without Planning's initial strategic breakthrough.

## **OUTSTANDING RESULTS**

The Family Mealtimes Matter campaign has been a major success for both Continental & for our consumers. Continental has seen record sales for Side Dishes & a lift in brand scores off the back of this integrated campaign. This led to renewed confidence in Continental amongst retailers & across the Unilever business. Our consumers loved the campaign; 'Brilliant thing to support', 'I look at Continental in a different way now' & 'It's (Family Mealtimes) really important to me'. They also engaged fully in the campaign micro-site with signatures on the pledge exceeding expectations. This in time could become a lobbying tool to encourage the state to legislate for the importance of family mealtimes & fairer working practices. You only have to look to the decline of the Howard Government over Work Choices to see what a motivating and politically sensitive issue this can be...

## **IN CONCLUSION**

The 'Family Mealtimes Matter' campaign & social cause has given meaning & heart to the Continental brand, and an elevated role for Continental in Australian society beyond just being 'Partner in the Kitchen'. This brand strategy & creative work could be exported globally for the Knorr brand; this is a case study for Australia capturing first a global social truth and then punching above its weight both strategically & creatively.

To sum up, the Family Mealtimes Matter campaign has provided Continental with a unifying thought for a diverse brand; has transformed our relationship with the consumer from partner to hero; has trumped our competitors by moving from a product & category insight to a social one; and finally has caused reassessment of Continental's role from fall-back to inspiration!

Because we know that all family mealtimes matter & Continental has successfully championed this cause

## APPENDIX

### Research Undertaken

Collated global findings on society & families from the USA, South America, the UK, Germany, South Africa & the Knorr Global team. We reviewed further broadsheet headlines over the last couple of years for critical social issues in Australian society, the press being a strong barometer of social change & concerns. Finally and most ambitiously, we commissioned a renowned sociologist to do a deep dive onto the lives of our MGBs; Dr Rebecca Huntley, the Director of Research at the Ipsos Mackay Report. Her social research scope comprised of desk research, a qualitative study with parents & children, and a thousand respondent quantitative study into eating & mealtime habits across the nation's families. This was the first time such a far reaching social report had been commissioned by a food brand in Australia. We didn't just stop with Dr Huntley's involvement. We sought input from Clare Collins, the Associate Professor in Nutrition and Dietetics at the School of Health Sciences, at the University of Newcastle; from Brian Babington, the CEO of Families Australia (a cause body devoted to raising & helping solve the issues which modern Australian families face), and from Dr Helen Truby of The Children's Nutrition Research Centre. This deep & far reaching research study was supported by depth qualitative research & consumer immersions within the homes of our Mums, where the impact of Continental would really count.



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