

# Classic Case Study: Old Spice Brand Repositioning

## Introduction

In 2010, Old Spice, a long-established men's grooming brand, released a commercial titled "The Man Your Man Could Smell Like." This ad featured a charismatic and quick-witted spokesman (portrayed by actor Isaiah Mustafa) speaking directly to female viewers in a playful, over-the-top manner. The commercial quickly became a pop-culture phenomenon, not only boosting Old Spice's fortunes but also redefining how brands communicate in the digital age.

Initially, Old Spice had been perceived as a classic, even old-fashioned, brand for men's aftershave and deodorant products. While it maintained a steady customer base, it struggled to engage younger consumers and risked falling behind trendier grooming competitors. The "Man Your Man Could Smell Like" campaign revitalized the brand with humor, creativity, and a social media-savvy execution that caught the public's imagination.

This case study explores the background of Old Spice prior to the campaign, the commercial's core messaging and strategic objectives, and how the brand effectively identified women as a key buying audience in the family decision-making process. Your task is to review the case study information - plus review the videos provided - and then address the discussion questions at the end.

## Brand Image Before the Campaign and Their Need for Repositioning

Old Spice's brand heritage stretches back several decades, originally known for aftershave lotions and cologne with a distinctive, somewhat classic scent. Associated with older, more traditional buyers, Old Spice risked being perceived as out of touch with younger generations who favored edgier, fashion-forward brands.

Its packaging and advertising often featured nautical themes - a nod to the brand's maritime-inspired heritage - but these did little to capture the imagination of younger consumers in today's marketplace.

Although Old Spice occasionally experimented with new product variations (e.g., body sprays, deodorants), its marketing struggled to resonate with modern audiences.

Competitors like Axe targeted young men through provocative, sometimes irreverent campaigns, while Gillette emphasized high-tech razors and performance-driven grooming aids. As a result, Old Spice was becoming a dated, dull and boring brand, with its only positive attributes being history/heritage and reliability.

While brand loyalty among older consumers remained relatively stable, the brand needed a new direction (= brand repositioning) to modernize the brand in order to connect with new buyers and increase market share.

## Campaign Overview

"The Man Your Man Could Smell Like" debuted during the 2010 Super Bowl weekend. The 30-second spot opened with Isaiah Mustafa standing in a bathroom, addressing the camera directly with the memorable greeting: "Hello, ladies." The ad then took viewers on a surreal, rapid-fire journey. It quickly morphed from a shower setting to a sailboat, then to a beach, all while Mustafa rattled off comedic lines touting what could happen if their men used Old Spice rather than a generic body wash.

This seemingly simple, silly, and fun commercial was more than just a comedy skit. It contained several strategic marketing elements that propelled both the brand's repositioning, as well as driving significant earned media, including:

### Targeting the Buyer, Not the User

- The ad was primarily directed at women (the buyers), rather than to men (the users), identifying that in many households women purchase men's grooming items
- This component was a critical component in the brand's campaign success, as it tapped into the motivation and needs of the buyer and brand decision maker
- As a result, the brand was repositioned BOTH in the mind of the buyer/decider and of the user
- Understanding family decision making roles are often the key to improved sales and market share success

### Clearly Targeted Women as the Prime Audience

- From the ad's opening, it clearly communicated that the target for the ad was women in a relationship - with the opening line being, *"Hello, ladies. Look at your man, now back to me, now back at your man, now back to me..."*
- This connected the ad to females with the plan to capture their interest immediately
- This plan was amplified by the actor speaking straight to camera, as if he was addressing them in a conversation

### Use of Fun and Silly Humor

- The unusual scenes, changes, and narrative drew attention and interest in the ad
- It made the ad very shareable, driving earned media
- The humor and the spokesperson were both very likeable, boosting the likeability of the brand itself
- The parody-like approach of the ad poked fun at common marketing tactics, increasing the interest and engagement with the ad
- Yet despite the use of humor, the brand messaging was still clear and direct
- And the placement in the Super Bowl weekend - where viewer expectations for TVCs are high - ensured that the ad and its message had a strong impact on both the brand image and earned media success

## **Use of Fantasy**

- The scenes and situations in the ad extended beyond "everyday life" into the arena of fantasy - making the brand appear to be bold, adventurous and exciting
- For example, horses, fit/handsome males, spa baths, yachts, etc.
- This "lifestyle" depiction could be viewed as somewhat aspiration for both males and females in the household

## **Catchy One-Liners**

- Memorable quotes and the unexpected scenes lent itself well to online sharing, earned media, and even face-to-face word-of-mouth
- Quotes like, *"smell like a man", "I'm on a horse", "Hello, ladies" and "The man your man could smell like"*.

## **Positive Brand Image**

- The brand was presented in a very positive way, despite the humor and the silly one-liners
- There was a clear reason to buy Old Spice - it was a fun, modern, and good-smelling brand
- The ad communicated a fresh new image - a key part of the brand repositioning

## **Brand, Not Product, Focused**

- The Old Spice messaging was different to competitors (and to its past) as it did NOT list standard product benefits and features, such as "long-lasting deodorant" or "smells good" or "72-hour protection" - making the brand image shift the key message

## **Supported Existing Brand Image**

- While the ad was clearly designed to reposition the brand to be more modern and cutting-edge - this would have been as a positive for loyal customers of the brand
- Existing loyalty customers, typically older males who like the brand, would have had their brand choice validated by the ad - especially if they were concerned themselves that it was a dated old brand
- And the repositioning was done in a way in the ads that it was not negative in any way to the old/traditional brand image - it just pushed it to be fresh and modern, reinforcing the existing customers reasons to buy the brand

## **A Soft, Fun Message**

- The brand message was subtle and fun - as opposed to being too pushy - especially with its fun, tongue-in-cheek humor
- It did not list lots of product benefits, and allowed viewers to draw their own conclusions about the brand
- This "soft sell" approach would be better received and, therefore, more impactful on changing consumer attitudes toward the brand

## **Recap: The Role of Females in the Buying and Decision-Making Process**

Let's revisit the family decision making process in households, as referred to above.

One of the campaign's most significant insights was the recognition that, in many households, women are the principal shoppers for family toiletries and personal care items. Whether for teenage sons or husbands, female consumers often pick up daily-use grooming products as part of routine errands. Old Spice's approach in this campaign, targeting these female decision-makers, was an effective and innovative approach.

While it would be known in the industry that females were the prime buyers and decision makers for many grocery products, even male oriented products - the innovation in this case was to directly (and almost exclusively) target women in the brand's messaging. With the ad's portrayal of the "perfect" man suggesting to female grocery buyers, "Here's the adventurous, confident fantasy you might enjoy, and our product can help make that a reality."

However, it is important to note that despite this messaging, the ad itself did not belittle men. This is because of its communication style and its use of humor, where the tone reduced the potential for alienation by male consumers and viewers - making the brand's messaging a positive experience for all.

## **Follow-Up Campaigns**

Soon after its release, Old Spice rolled out the "response campaign," a series of short, personalized videos featuring Isaiah Mustafa replying to Twitter users, bloggers, celebrities, and even rival brand mascots.

These response videos, often turned around within hours of a social media post. This real-time, interactive approach was groundbreaking at the time for a consumer goods brand, effectively turning the marketing campaign into a two-way conversation. Old Spice's team produced 186 personalized video responses in only two days to individual users and celebrities who posed questions on social media

Old Spice continued to leverage its new brand image in subsequent campaigns and online activities. Isaiah Mustafa reprised his role in other commercials, occasionally joined by other characters (such as actor Terry Crews) to keep the momentum alive.

Though the original commercial had set a very high bar, these follow-up campaigns maintained the essence of humor, unpredictability, and direct audience engagement.

Some campaign extensions included short videos, jokes, and interactive Q&As with fans, social media polls and mini games that allowed fans to engage directly with the brand, and limited-edition product lines and/or packaging that referenced memes or lines from the campaign, designed to convert viral buzz into tangible consumer goods with additional value and reasons to buy.

## **Overall Impact on Brand Perception, Sales and Market Share**

Prior to 2010, Old Spice faced a battle against the brand perception of being seen as outdated. Consumer research showed that many younger men associated Old Spice with their fathers or grandfathers. However, this campaign (with its use of humor, characters, visuals, and earned media success) effectively enabled Old Spice to shake off its old-fashioned image almost overnight.

Very quickly, Old Spice gained a reputation as a witty, innovative, and culturally aware brand. Younger audiences, previously indifferent, became interested in the brand. Older loyalists, who had used Old Spice for years, responded positively, too. They appreciated the brand's pivot and saw in the ads a light-hearted celebration of masculinity rather than a rejection of the brand's heritage.

Additionally, the association with Isaiah Mustafa, who became known simply as "the Old Spice guy," further humanized the brand. His persona bridged the gap between comedic celebrity endorsement and the brand itself. Consumers began describing Old Spice in terms of "fun," "fresh," and "exciting".

In addition to repositioning and modernizing its image, Old Spice enjoyed significant sales and revenue benefits from the campaign, as outlined with these key marketing metrics:

- Old Spice body wash sales surged dramatically after the campaign. By May 2010 (about 3 months post-launch), unit sales of Old Spice Red Zone body wash were up +60% year-over-year, according to Nielsen
- By July 2010 (roughly 6 months in), sales had more than doubled versus a year earlier (+125% YoY), marking an all-time high for the brand
- Over the full 52-week period ending June 13, 2010, Old Spice body wash sales climbed about 16.7% in the U.S. (in tracked retail channels), as compared to the ~7% annual growth of the category at the time
- After the campaign, Old Spice leapfrogged to the #1 spot in the U.S. men's body wash market, becoming (by mid-2010) the top-selling brand in the category, both dollar sales and unit volume share
- The campaign generated over 2 billion earned media impressions
- In the first quarter of 2010, Old Spice captured around 75% of all online buzz about the top male body wash brands, with over half of these discussions driven by women sharing the ads

- Day 1 of the “Response” YouTube campaign (July 2010), Old Spice’s videos garnered 5.9 million views in 24 hours - this made it the fastest-growing online video campaign in history up to that point in time
- The Old Spice YouTube channel gained huge popularity, with subscribers jumping from roughly 65,000 pre-campaign to over 150,000 by the end of the response campaign - this surge made Old Spice the number one most-viewed branded channel of all time on YouTube (and the number 2 most-subscribed branded channel) as at mid-2010

## **Lasting Impact on the Brand and on Marketing**

Over a decade after the original commercial’s debut, the “Man Your Man Could Smell Like” campaign endures as a go-to example of effective viral advertising. Beyond the immediate spike in sales, the brand’s positioning shifted substantially. Younger consumers who once viewed Old Spice as outdated began to see it as a cool, humorous, and relevant choice. That shift opened doors for product diversification to body washes, deodorants, and even haircare lines specifically tailored to younger demographics.

In the broader advertising terms, Old Spice’s success encouraged other brands to experiment with comedic, share-friendly formats and to engage directly with consumers via social media. The notion of producing rapid-response content became a go-to practice for marketers, with many brands attempting to replicate Old Spice’s agile, humorous model.

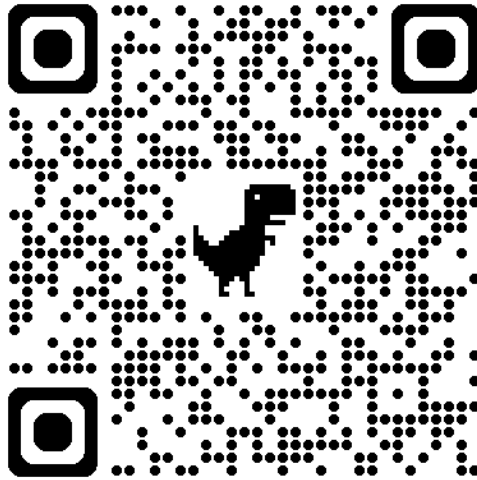
Therefore, “The Man Your Man Could Smell Like” campaign is more than just a funny commercial - it's a pivotal chapter in the history of modern advertising - and why it is a classic case study.

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### **Case Study Data Sources**

- Effie Awards Case Study – “Old Spice ‘Smell Like a Man, Man’” (2011)
  - Nielsen and SymphonyIRI Sales Data – Reported by Adweek/CampaignBrief (2010)
  - P&G/Old Spice Press Statements – Documentation of campaign results (2010)
  - Wieden+Kennedy Campaign Summary – Overview of campaign creative and impact
  - PRSA Silver Anvil Summary – Analysis of earned media impressions from the Old Spice PR campaign (2010)
  - Social Media Metrics Reports – Data from Visible Measures and Mashable (2010)
  - Isabelle Ringnes Case Write-Up – Old Spice case study and industry analyses (2013)
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## Old Spice Campaign Video to Review



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### Student Discussion Questions

1. What specific creative elements within the “Man Your Man Could Smell Like” commercial and continued campaign contributed to its earned media and repositioning success?
2. In general terms, why is repositioning a risk so challenging? What needs to be changes and what are the risks to the brand?
3. Why was targeting females (as buyers) the key to the Old Spice campaign’s success?
4. Discuss the role of humor in repositioning the brand. Would the repositioning efforts have been as successful without the use of humor?
5. In terms of metrics and results, which ones stand out as being the most important in measuring the campaign's success, or are they all interrelated?
6. What are the key marketing lessons for other brands stemming from this campaign and its success.