

**MEJO 531 – Case Studies in Public Relations
Final Case Study**

Empowering Female Athletes: Introducing Cracker Jill

Synopsis

Brand Background: Frito-Lay North America

If you have ever been to a baseball game, you have likely snacked on a red, white and blue bag of caramel popcorn and peanuts known as Cracker Jacks. The American classic has been around for more than 120 years (“Frito-Lay,” PR Newswire, 2022). Frito-Lay is a business unit within PepsiCo’s convenience food portfolio that eventually bought the Cracker Jack brand. With 29 snack brands to date, Frito-Lay continues to grow and deliver consumers their favorite snacks since 1965 (Frito-Lay).

Fritos, Doritos and Cheetos are just a few of the popular snack brands owned by Frito-Lay. From chips to pretzels to cookies, they have a brand representing it all. The company has employed nearly 55,000 dedicated workers and is a tremendous player in the food industry (Frito-Lay). Currently valued at \$23 billion, Frito-Lay is equipped with the resources to change lives and communities around the world (“Cracker Jack,” PR Newswire, 2023).

Through ever-present sustainability efforts and community support, Frito-Lay's impact is just getting started. As a part of advancing the mission “to create more smiles with every sip and every bite,” Frito-Lay partners with national non-profit organizations and food programs such as Feed the Children and the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas (Frito-Lay). The greater goals of PepsiCo include “providing nutritious foods to underserved communities and consumers, supporting the advancement of women and girls, and spurring prosperity and economic development in the communities where we operate” (Frito-Lay). In a recent campaign, Frito-Lay partnered with the Women’s Sports Foundation to reimagine the original face of the Cracker Jack brand.

Campaign Background: Introducing Cracker Jill

On the opening day of the 2022 Major League Baseball (MLB) season, the brand took the market by storm and came out with special edition bags of Cracker Jill. They encouraged fans to support the Women’s Sports Foundation (WSF) alongside their \$200,000 donation (“Frito-Lay,” PR Newswire, 2022). Created in 1974, the WSF exists “to enable girls and women to reach their full potential in sport and life” (WSF). Through advocacy, education and funding, the WSF fights for equality and participation in female athletics. The organization works with more than 1,000 champion athletes to uplift communities and inspire future athletes (WSF).

Black artist Monica Ahanonu designed five different Cracker Jill characters to represent the diversity of women in America. The brand also worked with award-winning artist Normani to write and record an updated version of the classic song “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” as part of the overall campaign (“Frito-Lay,” PR Newswire, 2022).

A year later, the Cracker Jill legacy lives on and the campaign remains active today. The “I Am Cracker Jill” award recognizes nine female athletes to join the brand team and inspire the upcoming generation of girls. Professional soccer player, Mallory Swanson, and paralympic swimmer, Jessica Long, are both ambassadors of Cracker Jill and helped select the 2023 award winners. Lindsey Zurbrugg, a member of the USA Women’s Wheelchair Basketball National Team, landed an official spot on the Cracker Jill roster as the grand prize winner and will be the face of the special edition packaging released in 2024 (Cracker Jill).

Publics and Objectives Involved

The overall objective for Frito-Lay and Cracker Jack is to celebrate women athletes and empower young girls while simultaneously creating consumer support for the rebranding campaign of their classic snack. The company's main objective gets more specific in the case of each public.

Female Athletes: At the center of the campaign is a community of female athletes. The champion partners of the WSF, winners of the "I Am Cracker Jill" awards, and brand ambassadors, all come together to fight for gender equality in sports. In terms of female athletes, Cracker Jill's objective is to support those looking to break the mold and stereotypes engraved in athletics. They want to raise awareness of the historical and current inequalities surrounding the sports industry and contribute to the catalyst of change.

Existing Consumers: Cracker Jacks have been around for more than 120 years and are known for being the classic snack of American baseball. Sold in all MLB stadiums around the country, the popcorn and peanuts attract fans of the sport, males. In terms of existing consumers, Cracker Jill's objective is to show how the special edition rebrand is about inclusivity. They are looking to gain support for the cause through existing consumers who are loyal to the product.

Potential Customers: Baseball stadiums are often filled with families, meaning mothers and daughters are also searching for a ballgame snack. The female representatives on Cracker Jill's new packaging are geared toward catching the female eye within a male-dominated arena. In terms of potential customers, Cracker Jill's objective is to represent a diverse demographic. They want young girls to envision themselves as the characters on the bag and dream big.

Key Programming

- **2022**
 - Frito-Lay added female faces to their Cracker Jack brand to represent a more inclusive demographic ("Frito-Lay," PR Newswire, 2022).
 - The brand partnered with award-winning artist Normani to record a new version of the classic song "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" ("Frito-Lay," PR Newswire, 2022).
 - The first five Cracker Jill characters were created by influential artist, Monica Ahanonu ("Frito-Lay," PR Newswire, 2022).
 - Packages of Cracker Jill were sold in stadiums during the MLB's season opener in April ("Frito-Lay," PR Newswire, 2022).
- **2023**
 - Professional soccer player, Mallory Swanson, and paralympic swimmer, Jessica Long were named Cracker Jill ambassadors (Cracker Jill).
 - Bella Rasmussen, Corinne Thompson, Emma Stertz, Jaleen Roberts, Lindsey Zurbrugg, Olivia Ohlson-Ellis, Sally Cohen, Sohana Raisa, and Tahirah Abdul-Qadir were selected as winners of the "I Am Cracker Jill" award ("Cracker Jack," PR Newswire, 2023).
 - Wheelchair basketball player, Lindsey Zurbrugg, was announced as the "I Am Cracker Jill" grand prize winner (Cracker Jill).

- **2024**
 - Zurbrugg’s special-edition packaging is scheduled to become available nationwide (“Cracker Jack,” PR Newswire, 2023).

Outcome

From the opening day of the MLB 2022 season alone, Cracker Jill generated more than 3,000 donations to the Women’s Sports Foundation and achieved 48% overall share-of-media conversation compared to other brands (Ketchum). From the most recent statistical reports by PR and marketing agency Ketchum, Normani’s reimagined video of the classic ballpark song received 644,000 views and 2,739 social engagements (Ketchum). Overall, the inspiring campaign continues to spark conversation and progress in the realm of women’s athletics as seen through the 9.2 billion earned impressions (Ketchum).

Analysis

1. Reimagine your brand.

In a modern and dynamic consumer landscape, don’t be afraid to switch things up. You can reimagine both your brand’s internal purpose and external appearance through new goals and updated visuals. Keep up with current trends to determine how popular brands and products successfully attract modern audiences so that you can apply these tactics to your new branding strategy.

Develop a new vision and purpose.

A brand’s purpose is often a guiding factor in how they are perceived by the public. For those looking to refresh their brand, outlining an updated vision with new goals is a good place to start. Research what is going on in the world and follow along with industry news to develop a purpose that will attract potential customers.

In alignment with advocacy ramping up on behalf of women in the sports industry, Cracker Jack decided it was time to celebrate and raise awareness for female athletes. For over 120 years the Cracker Jack brand has been centered around American baseball and the men who play and support the game. Realizing that it was time for a new vision, the brand created Cracker Jill to fight against the grain. There is no better way to attract a female audience than to place them at the forefront of the brand. By supporting efforts to break stereotypes and inequalities in the sports world, the brand formed a new purpose that continues to inspire young girls.

The classic cranberry brand, Ocean Spray, has been around for nearly 100 years, and so has their original advertisement that pops straight in your head. For the past two years, the brand has begun to stray away from the two old men standing in a cranberry bog to attract younger generations and reimagine their brand. Ocean Spray outlined a new vision for their creative campaigns, and it focuses on the power of the cranberry; “What will you do with all that power” (“Ocean Spray,” PR Newswire, 2022)? The thought-provoking slogan, combined with the emphasis on health benefits, devised a new brand purpose for Ocean Spray that stresses the audience’s journeys.

Refresh your visual identity.

Iconic brand looks are great, but it is also important to have a fresh edge. Update elements of your brand's visual identity such as the logo or font. Don't make too drastic of changes and become unrecognizable by consumers who know and love the brand. Start by incorporating smaller changes and slowly evolving. Maybe you modernize a brand photo but keep the original color scheme. Decide what makes the sight of the brand unique and capitalize on the details that people would miss.

When Cracker Jack decided to make special-edition bags of Cracker Jill in celebration of women in sports, a part of the campaign was to redesign the classic visual identity of the snack. The team successfully executed a redesign that incorporated new elements while maintaining the iconic look that keeps the brand recognizable. The two visual elements that were updated were spin-offs of the original name and mascot. Cracker Jack was changed to Cracker Jill, which was a subtle yet meaningful adjustment. To reflect this, the male sailor pictured on the original packaging was overtaken by five different female characters. The combination of fresh visuals with the original layout and color scheme modernized the brand's look and caught the eye of the public without straying too far from its classic roots.

In support of the brand's new vision focused on the power of the cranberry, Ocean Spray has refreshed its visual identity through new creative advertisements. In the most recent attempt to appeal to younger generations, their new commercial features an old woman spiking the punch at a corporate party with cranberry juice ("Ocean Spray," PR Newswire, 2022). Many viewed the advertisement as too drastic of a change from their classic commercial, leaving the identity unrecognizable by some. Although the brand was trying to freshen up for modern audiences, it was perhaps too much too soon.

2. The power of cause-related marketing.

Brands need to look beyond monetary value and determine ways that they can make a difference in society and their local communities. Decide on a societal issue that best aligns with the brand's overall values and audience. Brainstorm ways to raise awareness and funds for that specific cause, while simultaneously marketing your brand.

Picking a non-profit partner.

Countless nonprofit organizations around the nation set out to achieve great work. Before you can begin searching for a non-profit partner, make sure you have determined the cause of focus. Pick an issue that resonates with your brand's audience, values and greater mission. Begin researching non-profits specific to that area of focus. Talk to as many organizations as possible to get a feel for their culture and skills in terms of collaborating on a campaign. Position your brand in an ideal situation to achieve as much greatness for the cause as possible.

Cracker Jill and the WSF operate as an efficient team when it comes to fighting against gender inequalities in sports. The vision and goals of the Cracker Jill campaign, and overall brand, perfectly match the greater mission of the WSF to advocate, encourage and inspire. Through collaborative efforts, they showcased that gender representation and equity matter. As part of the campaign customers are encouraged to donate to the WSF in exchange for a bag of Cracker Jill, both raising awareness for the organization and supporting the cause.

The Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Association is a non-profit organization supporting the rare but fatal disease (Swann). In the summer of 2014, the organization went viral

with the ALS ice bucket challenge, a campaign that was ultimately created entirely through influential social networks and individuals. In this case, the partnerships were not chosen, instead they formed themselves. As donations and awareness began swarming in, an influx of celebrities began to take part. Raising around \$115 million in just eight weeks, the campaign showed that people care about people and that their community values tend to align with the non-profit's greater mission (Swann).

Making a campaign mutually beneficial.

For a campaign to benefit both the brand and the non-profit organization involved, the partnership needs to focus on intertwining their goals. In a cause-related marketing campaign, the main goal should be clear, driving change for the issue at hand. A for-profit brand will most likely be able to contribute more monetary value in donations, but a non-profit organization can provide the cost of effort. The non-profit's experience and knowledge in the field will support the decision-making processes and communication efforts. A campaign needs to be mutually beneficial, and in cause-related marketing, producing a strong social impact is a win-win situation.

The Cracker Jill campaign in support of the WSF produced great results, for both partners. When Cracker Jill was sold on the opening day of the MLB season in 2022, more than 3,000 people donated to the cause, while consumer favorability for the snack brand increased by 13% (Ketchum). The link for donating was set up through the Cracker Jill website, drawing online traffic to both organizations. The campaign's 9.2 billion impressions benefited both the snack brand and the nonprofit (Ketchum). Aside from the successful results, the campaign raised awareness and created change for the greater issue of gender inequality in sports.

In the unique case of the media-powered ALS campaign, the nonprofit was flooded with benefits including tripled research funding, \$220 million in donations, and an exponential growth in awareness (Swann). Since they had no official partnerships, but rather voluntary participants, most benefits were in favor of the non-profit. However, the ALS Foundation continued expressing their gratitude for the love and support they were receiving. They did their best to keep the public informed on the impact they were making.

3. Increase outreach.

Move beyond your existing consumer base and attract new audiences. Identify who your current audience is and brainstorm contrasting groups. Once you have selected your new target audience, come up with a plan for successfully capturing their attention.

Determine your target audience.

To help expand your brand's outreach, pinpoint a new target audience. Identify existing consumers and determine who the brand currently resonates with. Assess consumer trends and statistics to uncover a group of people who are not currently associated with your brand. Evaluate whether the potential audience would likely support your brand based on the campaign's goals or overarching mission.

Consumer-based trends show that Cracker Jack's existing audience tends to be men. The brand decided to try and focus on nearly an entire half of the population that was lacking from their consumer base, making their new target audience females. With Cracker Jill being a woman-centered campaign, the brand has piqued the interest of female communities. As the

campaign grows, the brand will likely continue to accumulate large amounts of support from this new audience.

“The Workout Called Life” campaign by wellness company Therabody was launched to expand their consumer base (Berger). Since its creation in 2009, the brand’s therapy massage gun has been a hot commodity among athletes. Moving beyond the sports industry, the brand wanted to appeal to a new target audience, everyday people. No matter the lifestyle, anyone’s body can get worn out and Therabody wants to provide a solution.

Resonate with your audience.

Brands are more likely to attract consumers if they feel connected to them in some way. After having identified a new target audience, brainstorm what would draw them in. People want to see themselves represented in a campaign. Make sure to reflect society at large and highlight the true diversity of the entire population.

To resonate with their new female audience, Cracker Jill designed five different characters to be the face of the brand. Each Jill was uniquely different, showcasing a variety of female body types and ethnicities (“Frito-Lay,” PR Newswire, 2022). By partnering with Black artists Monica Ahanonu and Normani to bring the characters to life and record the reimagined version of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” Cracker Jill truly embodied the importance of representation. They didn’t stop there, the campaign teams were led by strong women and underrepresented industry professionals (“Frito-Lay,” PR Newswire, 2022). Diverse representation allows young girls to identify with the campaign, feeling inspired and destined for greatness.

The brand produced a series of creative advertisements to attract its new target audience. The advertisements depicted a wide range of lifestyles including grandparents watching their grandchildren, healthcare workers in the hospital, delivery workers driving endlessly, parents cleaning around the house, and more (Berger). The campaign successfully resonates with many target audience members, letting them know they deserve relief just as much as professional athletes (Berger).

4. Strategically launch your campaign.

When it comes to the logistics of your brand campaign, be strategic about when and where you choose to launch it. Incorporate your brand strategy and target audience in the planning process. Decide whether sticking to one time and location is best, or if it would be beneficial to work across a mix of channels and agendas.

When to launch your campaign.

A timeline can often make or break the outcome of a campaign. Account for industry news and current happenings in society; don’t launch a campaign during the same window as your competitors. Plan to launch your campaign during a time of relevance or anticipation. Determine a special connection to a certain day or feeling of excitement for a specific event.

The Cracker Jill campaign focused on two main elements for the time frame of its campaign launch. As efforts by champion athletes to bridge the gap of gender inequalities in the sports industry increased, the Cracker Jack brand hopped on board to back them. The brand also planned for its usual consumer base, MLB fans, and aligned the Cracker Jill launch with the

league's opening day. This brought attention to the campaign's existing customers who were already loyal to the brand and likely to purchase the product.

On November 6, 2022, Marvel Studios launched their local movie premiere campaign for "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" (Tartaglione). To promote the release of the upcoming movie, the studio planned multiple premieres in various locations to build anticipation. The movie was officially released five days later, providing just enough time for the campaign to earn loads of media attention. The most celebrated stop on the premiere tour gave the movie one last push to the public before it hit the theaters.

Where to launch your campaign.

After creating a timeline for your campaign, decide where you will launch it. Determine if it will take place online, in-person, or a mix of both. Figure out where your target audience is most active, whether it be on a specific social media platform or potential event location. Leverage the spaces they already engage in and direct the launch of your campaign to those specific locations.

The launch of the Cracker Jill campaign was both online and in-person. They sold the first production of the limited-edition bags across multiple MLB stadiums throughout the country ("Frito-Lay," PR Newswire, 2022). Since Cracker Jack is known to be popular at baseball games, the brand capitalized on the location to drive successful sales on the opening day of the season. The brand launched a new website to act as the home base for information on the campaign and how to donate. Expanding from their website, Cracker Jill encouraged fans to check out their social media to engage with what's to come and stay up to date on the impact of their support.

In an iconic experiential marketing campaign launch, the movie premiere for "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" was held in Lagos, Nigeria. To honor the movie's African heritage and audience, Marvel Studios decided there was no better location for the event to take place. The Black Panther team worked with the Africa International Film Festival to create a memorable in-person experience for local fans in Nigeria. The premiere was a significant milestone for Africa as it advanced the continent's entertainment industry and fostered pride among citizens (Tartaglione).

Resources

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