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MAF: [00:00:00] Welcome back to Behavioral Science for Brands, a podcast where we connect academic insights and practical marketing to help you grow your brand and your business. Every other week we sit down and look at some of the country's best brands and the behavioral science that's powering them. I'm Michael Aaron Flicker.

RS: And I am Richard Shotton

MAF: today we're exploring Hendricks Gin, a brand that's wrapped up in a whole lot of eccentricity, some vintage appeal, and a number of psychological tactics that are helping power their success. Let's get into it. So Richard, Hendrix Gin is a brand owned by William Grant Sons, launched here in the United Kingdom in 1998, and then came to the United States in 1999.

Have you tried the product? Yes. Yeah. It's a distinct flavor profile.

RS: Yeah, I'm not sure about the sophistication of my palate. I'm not sure I can tell. Once it's been mixed with tonic. Right, you've mixed away. Well, uh,

MAF: from the brand website, let me [00:01:00] read to you. Um, an unusual flavor profile, according to Hendrix, infused with hints of rose, cucumber, and 11 other botanicals.

Uh, and we'll talk about this in a little bit more detail in a minute, also in a very unique bottle. Uh, an apothecary style bottle reminiscent of the Victorian era. So we'll come back to that, but really an interesting brand in 2003, four years after it's launched wall street journal described it as the best gin in the world.

And as of this year, It's the sixth largest brand 2023. They had an 18 percent increase in total sales to 1.6 million, nine liter cases, measurement of spirit sales, and a 1.6 million cases makes it the sixth largest brand, uh, six largest gin in the world. Um, and so. What we're interested in as we talk about and dissect Hendrix as a brand [00:02:00] is this claim they have, which is gin made oddly, and this ethos that they've built a brand world as a most unusual gin.

So let's start with. The creation of the flavor profile. It doesn't taste like other gins inspired by David Stewart, who is the founder of the gin. He used to eat cucumber sandwiches in a Rose garden, and he had this vision that he can make a gin that tasted unique and set it apart from other London dry, dry gins.

And so, uh, Him and only three other people know the formulation of Hendrix. So there's already this lore, this mystique that's around the brand about a very special recipe, kind of inspired in a unique way, but they pair up with a Philadelphia ad man, Steve grass, and he. It comes up with this fun, eccentric, surreal, [00:03:00] you called it a Monty Python esque style world.

And when you look at the bottle, it's very unique. One, it's got a very dark, almost, it's dark brown, but almost looks black, um, colored glass to protect the gin from sunlight. If you look at the actual bottle, it's got ornate labeling on a Victoria style labeling, helping it feel very vintage. Uh, so you take that, plus the marketing world they've created, we'll put some of their creative that has that Monty Python esque.

Feel plus some quirky things. Like every year the brand celebrates cucumber day on June 14th, and they even had a cucumber spade shaped airship that toward 13 U S cities. They've got this eccentric. worldview that they're bringing to consumers. Very different than let's say a classic gin would do a [00:04:00] proper, a proper gym would do.

So when we dive into Hendrix today, we're going to look at two different areas. First is it's unusual flavor profile and it's distinctive marketing. Help it tap into something called the van. The Von Restorff effect, which we've looked at before. And second, we'll talk a little bit more about the nostalgia they're seeking to evoke and how that's helped them create a unique spot in consumers minds.

So let's get into it. Let's talk about this Von Restorff effect and what we see going on here.

RS: Yeah. The most striking thing about their advertising is its distinctiveness. If you look up. The big gins that are out there, the aviation gin, the tankerays, the Bombay Sapphires. Hendricks behave in a completely different style to those, those, those other brands.

Now that taps into one of the oldest. It's an idea that goes all the way back to 1933 in the work of a German psychologist called [00:05:00] Hedwig von Resselorff. And what von Resselorff proved was that we are hardwired to notice what is distinctive. So if you behave Differently, if you behave distinctively from your competitors, from the things that you're surrounded by, people are much, much more likely to notice your, your messaging.

That was a study, what, near over 90 years ago, nearly a hundred years old. So it's very easy to think, well. Okay. That might've been true back then, but the world's changed. It's no longer so relevant now, but I reran, uh, Bon Restore study a few years ago, and I did it very simply. I showed people a sheet with lots of numbers on and all of the numbers bar one were black, the remaining number was blue and people were.

30 times more likely when I later on asked them what they could remember to remember the distinctive number rather than the other numbers. Now that's not about the power of [00:06:00] blue versus black, it's the power of contrast and distinctiveness. Because when I repeated the study, but flipping it so people saw a sheet Almost entirely composed of blue numbers with one black number.

And it was the black number that was suddenly much, much more recognizable. Now I did that in all sorts of different ways with logos, with numbers, with colors, and it kept on finding the same result. What people remember is the distinctive, uh, uh, bit of information. Too many brands though. Just mirror what their competitors do they look around they see what the norms of behavior and they feel that those are things they must adopt if they want to launch a gin or a vodka or any other brand but that is a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature one of the repeated findings from psychology is.

We are selective in what we pay attention to. Most stimulus is edited [00:07:00] out, but one of the surefire tactics for getting attention or boosting the probability of being noticed is to behave distinctively. So identify the category of conventions and then. Make sure you pick one or two, maybe inconsequential conventions that you're going to break and that boosts the probability of being noticed.

MAF: I think that that's where the art and the science meet. So when you talk about identify the category conventions, Pick ones that you can break. One of the safety features we would want to put on this is if Hendricks gin was in what looked like a wine bottle, it might fail. So you have to break the right category convention so that you are distinctive and noticeable, but not mistaken for something that you're not.

RS: So if you. If you put your gin in a wine bottle, um, it might be a problem in a supermarket if it is the style of a bottle that [00:08:00] people use to identify you. So if they're out shopping for a gin, they might almost be blind to that wine bottle. So I think you're right. There might be some. Um, category behaviors that are crucial to adhere to what you really want to do, though, is map out all those different, um, behaviors that your competitors do and split them into two

groups, which ones are there for a very good reason, leave them alone, but which ones are there just for tradition sake and what Hendrix discovered was the tradition of communicating with kind of a modern visual style that was just a convention that wasn't a necessary thing that the consumer needed to identify.

The product is a gin so they took that convention and they broke it repeatedly so that I think you're right is it is a way to think about applying the one restaurant effect

MAF: and we have another episode on liquid death where we talk about them breaking the category convention of the packaging so there's no sacred you know [00:09:00] there's.

Every category, every business case, as you say, you should look broadly across the category conventions and find the thing that makes most sense for liquid death. It was, the packaging had to stand very far apart from the Poland Springs and the Evians on the, on the shelf. In, uh, Hendrick's case, it was not about changing the glass mold as much.

It was about creating this distinctive brand world.

RS: Yeah. And I really like the fact that. They've pushed this distinctiveness into multiple elements of the, of the brand. So there's the medicinal style bottle, you know, recognized as a gym, but gives off that kind of Victorian, uh, aura. You've got the quirky advertising style that they've used consistently, but you've even got it down to the serve.

So the Hendrix serve is with cucumber, not, not lemon or lime or whatever people stick in gins. And I think that's super clever as well, [00:10:00] because when it comes to the serve, it is really important that you behave distinctively. Because If you serve your gin in the exact same manner as everyone else, once the consumer has moved away from the bar, you have essentially become invisible.

I don't know if it's a Tanqueray or a Bombay Sapphire, if they're both served with ice and lime. But once you've moved away from the bar with a Hendrix, and it's got a cucumber in, it's immediately recognizable, and that starts tapping into social proof. Because it only takes a couple of people drinking, uh, a Clear liquid with cucumber for it to feel like.

Uh, this is a booming movement. So we talked about that much more in the Apparel episode, which is if you make your serve distinctive, even a very small

usership can look like it's very commonplace, and then you're sitting in train this virtual circle of social proof.

MAF: And when we talked about it in the [00:11:00] Apparel episode, you know, it was about a product change.

You needed it to have that red orange color. But here. Any brand can find something that's endemic to the product, the cucumber rose flavor, so they put a cucumber in and that's something that can be mass produced and distinctive and make sense in a Hendrix that would not make sense in a Bombay or in a Tangeray.

RS: Yeah. And it's, I think you're right to differentiate Hendrix and, uh, Aperol. Aperol. You know, they probably had a little bit of luck that when they were creating the product back in early 1900s, they probably won't think about distinctive. But it happened to come to their, their benefit. The great thing with Hendrix is even though the product is clear, they have created a serve that is completely distinctive.

So for a marketer, even if you are given a product that is interchangeable in terms of look with. Others. You've still got this extra opportunity to [00:12:00] create that distinctiveness.

MAF: So we've talked about Hendrix. We've talked about the bottle, the Victoria and heiress, uh, shape and the label. And we now have talked about the distinctiveness of the serve, but the creative campaign they have bundled with this brand.

Is really what some people I think will remember most, uh, this Monty Python esque world.

RS: Yeah, and the brilliant bit there is they have created a distinctive world. And they have, but they've been consistent in its application. So they're not being distinctive, uh, in a haphazard way. They have got very kind of strict brand guidelines.

So each time you see a Hendrix ad, you know, it's a Hendrix ad, you know, it adopts this, uh, Victorian, uh, uh, aesthetic. So. What this suggests is you want to be distinctive with the competition. You don't want to be distinctive with your [00:13:00] past behavior. That's a crucial thing. You want to be consistently distinctive because the more you do something, the more appealing you will become.

So there's an idea called the mere exposure effect. Um, we've discussed that I think with the. Geico, Gecko episode in much more detail, but as a very quick reminder, based on the work of the University of Michigan psychologist called Robert Zajonc, uh, back in 1968. And what he showed is that the more we are exposed to a stimulus, the more appealing it becomes.

So even without Extra information. If we're exposed repeatedly to something, it develops a familiarity and a warmth towards it. So you don't want to be chopping and changing your creative style. You want to be distinctive with the competition, not distinctive with yourself.

MAF: Yeah. So that was the big idea that we wanted to bring to everybody.

As you're talking, I'm thinking about the actual creative and we can put some in the show notes. It's very intricate. [00:14:00] There's a, a flywheel that turns a bigger wheel and there's a man that pushes something over and it feels very much like a mousetrap, but everything is connected. Do you think that attention to the detail?

Gives you a more positive effect that if they're that intricate in their advertising, surely this unique flavored gin, they were that, um, intricate and that much attention to detail on the gin itself. Is there something going on there with the creative?

RS: I mean, I hadn't thought of it like that, but I think that's an absolutely fair argument.

I'd more thought of it as. Much modern design is about simplicity and elegance, whereas I think something that was, uh, much more common in the Victorian era was this love of, you know, flamboyant, uh, intricacy. So for me, it was just a facet of distinctiveness. But I think you're absolutely right. There's certainly studies into this idea of the illusion of effort, [00:15:00] that exactly the same products will be viewed as higher quality.

If people believe lots of effort has got into it. So there may be an element of that going on with the design.

MAF: And, uh, what you cannot show in a bottle and a glass, you can show in your creative. So that's where your creative campaign is creating. More of the narrative that you want people to feel beyond what you can do with just a bottle and glass by itself on a stage.

So let's head to break and when we come back, we're going to talk about how this Victorian style era evokes nostalgia in consumers that's also playing to their benefit.

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MAF: Welcome back to Behavioral Science for Brands, a podcast where we connect academic insights and practical marketing to help you grow your brand and your business.

And today we're talking about Hendrix Gen, uh, a product that's got a lot of eccentricity, a lot of quirks. And a lot of nostalgia. So in the second half of our episode, we wanted to really focus on that nostalgia, Richard, and specifically talk about the psychology that's going on when people see something more of a throwback, something more.

In their past.

RS: It's, it's a really interesting tactic because there's evidence that's just, if you get people to think about their past, if you get people to think about historical eras, they become less price sensitive.

MAF: Mm.

RS: So the evidence of this comes from a study by a ed, it's a [00:17:00] 2014 study when it was at the University of Southampton, and he gets people to flick through a little booklet with lots of print ads.

And after they've looked at the print ads, they say how much they'd be prepared to pay for the, the, the product that's being advertised. And the twist in the experiment is some people see a message that reminds them of their past, other people see a more neutral message. So as one example, and we'll put this in the show notes, some people were showed a Kodak ad, a picture of a happy family, and it says remember special occasions with others from your past, take a moment to cherish your childhood memories.

That's the strapline that Kodak are using in the ad. Other people see same picture, same brand, but the copy says a special occasion with others. Think about making new memories starting today and well into your future. And what Sedekides found was that the people that saw the nostalgic ad reminded their past, they were less price sensitive.

They were more willing to pay a higher [00:18:00] amount for the product than people that saw the neutral ad or the ad that remind them about future benefits. So what's interesting here with Hendrix is, yes, Emphasizing this past world is super powerful because it's distinctive, but also by emphasizing a past world, it probably makes people more open to paying a premium.

MAF: Yeah, and if that's feeling maybe a little bit of a leap, you can look at lots of other brands that tie to a nostalgic past to help endear them to consumers and make people less price sensitive, uh, to what they're charging. Uh, we can put in the show notes, a famous ad by Budweiser called always there when they're showing the association between beer and baseball since the start of baseball and how beer has always been the product you consume with baseball and the spots [00:19:00] really designed.

to show that, you know, you should be, you should, you should think of beer and how great baseball is all at once.

RS: Yeah. I think it's exactly the same tactic, probably a more explicit version than, than what Hendricks is doing. And the, this insight that we've come to, let's price sense if we think about our past, I think rings true from personal experience.

If you think about what made you happy when you were a child, money's less likely to loom large than if you think, what's going to make me happy today. If we think about the now or the future, Earning money, financial elements are often very, very important. Yes. When we think back to the past, we think more about friendships and, uh, moods and, and, and, and moments and experiences often unrelated to money.

Now everyone has a very different experience. Sure. These are general. Trends, but the more you can get people to think about those past moments the less they will [00:20:00] typically think about money The more willing they are to spend.

MAF: Yeah, I wanted to dig on that point with you for a second Making you think of your past or of any past Should have that effect whether or not it's your personal childhood.

Is that true? Because hearkening back to a victorian era Is not the past most americans would have right

RS: yes yes it's still pushing away from current existing concerns in the in the present

MAF: that to me is the critical the critical idea were highlighting here if we can reframe the way you think and feel about the brand to be less about.

Hendricks is 29. 99 for a 750ml at the shelf, and more, look at this intricate, historic world that's filled with nostalgia. My frame for the brand is different.

RS: Absolutely. But it is probably a fair kind of pushback on that study in that every different behavioral science [00:21:00] experiment and insight will have a different degree of certainty.

Now, there are a certain group of people. Studies that have been repeated ad infinitum for 70, 80 years, social proof, scarcity, the von Resten effect. We can have a very high degree of certainty that they are going to work for our brand. When you start to get to studies like nostalgia, where. You know, there's a body of work, but it is smaller.

Now there is less certainty that it's going to be effective. I still think even for these studies, if you compare them with what we normally, or most markets are basing their decisions on, it's still a lot better than gut feeling and intuition and creative speculation.

MAF: Yeah. And ultimately connecting to nostalgia is another way, as Warren Buffett would say, to build a moat around your brand.

We were talking about this before the episode. How can you do something that just makes you different than the other top [00:22:00] 10 gins? And nostalgia is a great way to, to make yourself distinct and separate you from other brands. Yeah. I think,

RS: I think these, uh, that Buffett idea of. What can you do to put this protective moat in place to stop competitors encroaching on your territory and if you're Budweiser Emphasizing nostalgia in the past is probably easier to do than a craft beer that has launched Two years ago now.

It's easier for Budweiser to Uh, emphasize nostalgia. It doesn't mean it's impossible for those new brands, because one of the interesting things is you said right at the beginning, Hendrix was created in 1998, 1998,

MAF: relatively new

RS: yet from, I would say most young drinkers would come away from the impression thinking it's, how could you know, 150 years old?

Sure. Well, they, they embossed the bottle with 1888 or something. Yes. Same and. It's an ethical [00:23:00] grey zone, because to me that would give me the impression that Hendrix was created in 1888 or whatever date it does say. Uh, I think 1860. 1860. And now, and that is the foundation of William Grant. Correct. The distiller, not Hendrix the brand.

So it's a little bit ambiguous there, but maybe the The smart launch brand can create this, um, impression of a much longer heritage than they actually have.

MAF: Certainly we see in lots of research, any proof point of connection to a longer history or deeper lineage is something consumers believe leads to higher quality.

If you've been around that long, obviously you must be good. And so, uh, anything you can do to bring. The past connected to your brand will give you a sense of that, whether or not you put the number on a bottle. So that brings us close to the end of our episode today, Richard, [00:24:00] could you remind us of the top few things we discussed today?

RS: So we've discussed three big areas. The first was this idea of the Von Reston effect, this idea that we are hardwired to notice what's distinctive. That study was first shown back in 1933. But more recent studies have shown it's still just as impactful today. And it's very easy to get carried away as an advertiser with, um, creating an amazing impression, but the very fundamental task of any bit of communications to be noticed first and foremost, you don't get noticed.

Everything else is academic. The von Rests or effect is a powerful technique to boost the probability your message will be noticed. The second thing we talked about was the mere exposure effect. This idea that the more repeated a stimulus is, the more it repeated a message is, the warmer people will be towards it.

Even if. You give no extra information with all this added frequency. The mirror exposure effects suggest that that frequency will [00:25:00] increase

appeal. So the nuance here is yes, you need to be distinctive, but you should be distinctive with what other people are doing, not distinctive with your, your brand tends to do.

So you should be consistently distinctive. And then the third and final bit we talked about was the Sedakiti study. Uh, this idea that if you can harness nostalgia, if you can get people to think about their past or the past, they are less likely to be price sensitive. So for a premium gin like Hendrix, placing your brand world back in the Victorian era is a very smart thing to do.

MAF: Wonderful. The founder of Hendricks Gin, Richard, said he would have cucumbers in a rose garden. What is a unusual, uh, sandwich that you like? A childhood memory of a favorite food you would eat? Something that did not inspire you to create a gin, [00:26:00] but may be interesting to hear about. Ooh,

RS: uh, so something that I think about.

If I'm thinking about childhood food, definitely be Marmite, which is something I'd still eat now. Uh, so this is a yeast spread. Very, very popular in Britain. Very unpopular in America. Keep going. As in not known or unpopular. Not known. Okay. Um, some of the greatest advertisers in the last few years has come from Marmite.

They have this wonderful campaign of love it or hate it. It emphasized and broadcast the fact that a large portion of people hate their brand. The idea being, well, if it, some people hate it, surely some people will, will love it. It's a, uh, it's, you know, it's got, it's not a bland product at all. So I think that would be a childhood flavor.

And how would

MAF: you prepare that sandwich at home? Oh, you'd just have.

RS: Uh, bread.

MAF: Yes.

RS: And you'd spread quite a thick bit of strong, pungent marmite on top. Got it. And yourself, what would be the childhood flavor that you can remember? [00:27:00] I would say,

MAF: uh Um, growing up from a sandwich perspective, it would be thick mozzarella cheese and like prosciutto or some very thin ham, uh, with balsamic dressing.

That would be a very indulgent, uh, lunch choice that we would have from time to time. Well, that wraps up our episode today. If you found what you heard today on our episode helpful. Interesting. Please follow us on YouTube or leave a review that helps us better reach listeners more like you. And for more in depth content, go to the consumerbehaviorlab.

com. There we have a video of today's episode, a full transcript, and what we call show notes, which are the source materials, the studies, and the information that we talked about today available for your further reading. We also are on LinkedIn. where we share regular updates of things that are happening at the Consumer Behavior Lab.

Feel [00:28:00] free to follow us on LinkedIn for regular updates. Until next time, I'm MichaelAaron Flicker and I'm Richard Shelton. Thanks for tuning in and please tune in again week after next for the next episode of Behavioral Science for Brands.