

MARKETING WITH CARDS

The recent announcement that Cinzano is launching a major promotion based on a scratch-card game printed on its bottle labels marks a giant step forward for this type of sales promotion technique. Cinzano is putting out over four million bottles with a scratch-off instant-win roulette game printed on the inside of the back label.

Although the scratch-off technique has been with us since 1976, this promotion is a definite feather in the cap for Cinzano, its agency, Foote Cone and Belding, CBH and Partners, the sales promotion company which created the campaign, and Don Marketing, the company which has emerged as Britain's leading scratch-card specialist.

During initial discussions about the project, the idea of an on-label game was mooted and ruled out as a technical impossibility.

After all, it had never been done anywhere in the world. But the people at Don knew that this kind of game still had huge untapped potential in markets ranging from publishing to groceries, if only such technical barriers could be overcome.

'They told us it was impossible — we told them nothing was, and set about trying to solve the problems,' says John Chambers, who left Allen, Brady and Marsh a few months ago to stake his career on Don Marketing's future, under the guidance of John Donovan, one of the company's founders.

Chambers is now the company's managing director.

He talks about the potential of scratch-off games in visionary, almost apocalyptic, terms. But he is no wild-eyed fanatic: it is simply that he has seen clear evidence of the enormous marketing leverage a good game promotion can exert.

The classic case-history is the Great Guinness Challenge, a Match the Experts sports quiz which ran in 22,000 pubs and clubs last summer. Obviously, Guinness and ABM were not mounting a £1.3 million campaign just for the sheer aesthetics of it all. But everyone concerned was staggered at the results it produced — great interest, lots of goodwill and, on the bottom line, an extraordinary increase (estimated by trade sources at almost 30 per cent) in draught Guinness sales.

On label technology — Iain Murray meets Don Marketing where the scratch card technique has taken to the bottle on more than one brand . . .

Rubbing away to goodwill

ABM and Don had expected the challenge to stimulate joint efforts by groups of friends. But they had not foreseen the formation of quite large syndicates, and the news that computer enthusiasts were even trying to program their apples to lead them to the right answers was a definite tribute to the game, as well as a test of the thoroughness with which it had been planned.

If it had yielded up its secrets, the promotion would have backfired badly, resulting in a prize money pool carved up into ludicrously small

very close to a major prize. In the Guinness challenge, this effect was heightened by the Machiavellian introduction of a make-or-break decision point.

The Guinness cards had four columns of questions.

Having won a free game on the first column and 20p off his next Guinness on the second, the player would be among the minor cash prizes if he won again in Column Three. But he then had to choose whether to risk his Column Three prize by attempting Column Four, with its promise of a share in a larger cash pool.

The psychology was perfect. On one of the soccer cards, for example, competitors were asked to match the expert panel's ranking of the ability of eight famous midfield players in four different skills. For the contemporary footballers on the list, this was relatively easy.

But the younger fans would know little about, say, Bobby Charlton's skill at throw-ins. Such questions, demanding judgements on players of the Sixties and earlier, naturally led to a sociable breaking-down of age barriers in the pubs. As John Chambers puts it, 'Old George, sitting in the corner with his pint, suddenly found the younger lads were very interested in his opinions of past heroes.'

Ten million scratch-cards were used in the promotion, each one linked to the purchase of a pint of Guinness. Every card held the genuine potential to be a winner, depending entirely on the competitor's actions. As the promotion ran its course, Guinness voluntarily boosted the prize money pools to a total of

Conversion of a myth

shares. In the event, though, the challenge preserved its mystery and seemed to increase its appeal over the period from June to September.

The key to this success was a genuinely positive, enthusiastic consumer response, Jim Reatchlous, marketing manager at Guinness, stresses the two factors of 'talkability' and 'playability.' Talkability refers to the infectious word-of-mouth excitement triggered by the launch of a good, stimulating game, while playability is the powerful compulsion to try over and over until you win, and then go back and try again.

John Chambers would add a third factor, the built-in 'heartstopper' element.

The heartstopper comes into play when someone, casually playing the scratch-card, suddenly realises he is

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nearly £120,000 — and still clearly felt it was getting a bargain for its money.

The company claims it would be impossible to quantify the results of the promotion accurately.

But Jonathan Jameson, the marketing manager responsible for the on-trade, calls it 'an enormous success, producing a significant increase in sales,' and points out that the enthusiasm for the game was reflected in a large number of letters about it which arrived at the Guinness offices.

Between the Great Guinness Challenge and the new Cinzano label game, Don Marketing has put together a string of successful scratch-card promotions, based on cricket for Schweppes, horse racing for McEwans Lager and soccer for another campaign for Guinness in Ireland. Each one has had a positive impact on sales, and the future for the format is very bright, since, even when the novelty has worn off, it is still a very neat way of running instant-win quiz games on any subject at all.

Besides the Match the Experts formula, which Don Marketing has

John Donovan, chairman (left), John Chambers, managing director and Roger Sotherton, account manager for Don on Cinzano.

protected with a worldwide patent application there have been scratch-off 'perspective game' promotions for Terry's chocolates, Sakura colour films, Carlsberg lager and Champion spark plugs. These involve a picture of a shop window, a TV screen or a section of a racetrack, viewed from an oblique angle. The aim is to relate the positions of targets scattered on the angled image to a square-on grid. Though the appeal is different, they are much more difficult than they look — and they too have that tantalising 'maybe-next-time' quality.

All these games offer the opportunity to gain a tangible marketing advantage for a relatively modest outlay, without, for example, the double-edged impact of price promotions, which often compromise consumer perceptions of product quality.

Even with substantial prize pools, they usually cost no more than about 3p per card.

Paradoxically, Don Marketing is now exporting scratch-card expertise back to the US, where the idea came.

It has been negotiating with Coca-Cola about an instant-win game based on Q*bert, the latest video game hit. And it has just signed a revolutionary deal with NBC-TV for a game linked to information broadcast in a major soap opera, which could have spectacular implications for the US grocery business.

The ultimate target in America would be the huge national operations like McDonalds, which could easily be in the market for promotions with over a hundred million cards. But the most appealing area in the UK is probably the Fleet Street circulation battleground, where a scratch-card Match the Experts type of game could undoubtedly add an element of excitement and involvement which would trump the present passive promotions, such as bingo and the Daily Express Millionaire cards in which there is no element of skill. □