



Client:
Pittsburgh Brewing Company

Industry:
Alcoholic Malt Beverages

Project:
**Reinvigorate I.C. Light Beer
Brand Identity**
(PBC's #1 selling brand)

Challenges:

- Logotype had outdated 1970s look/feel (not good for the 1990's)
- Losing market share to national competitors
- Having key stakeholders buy into a new look/feel
- Inconsistency of brand touchpoints
- Internal budget was zero (for creative and/or materials)

Solutions:

- Updated branding in an evolutionary manner
- Maintaining the equity of original logotype with a more modern font and styling
- Personally invested own time and money
- Small test production run on commemorative cans
- Secondary updating of the new brand identity

Results:

- Significant improvements in brand appeal for younger market
- Increased brand awareness and relevance
- 360° consistency across brand touchpoints
- Increased sales and market share

I.C. Light Beer® Brand Identity Evolution

By: Kevin M. Bartoleit, Pittsburgh Brewing Company's Brand Evangelist, 1995-1999

Challenges

Pittsburgh Brewing Company is a regional brewery located in Western Pennsylvania producing top-selling regional beers such as Iron City and I.C. Light. In fact, I.C. Light was one of the original light beers in the 1970s, crafted to truly be a light beer and was not just a watered-down version of a brewery's flagship beer. The brand saw explosive growth in sales and beer market share in the tri-state region of Western Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia. In the 1970's and 1980's. However, while sales were climbing over the years for the nation's #1 regional brewer at the time, there was little done to update the look of the brand except minor typeface adjustments for the logotype.

In the early 1990's, however, sales were stagnant, market share was eroding due to the enormous budgets of the big three national brewers, and the younger market did not see the brand as relevant. They deemed it their "father's or grandfather's" beer of choice, certainly not theirs!

As the Art Director of PBC at the time, I thought of a brand identity effort to update the once-great brand to appeal to the target market of 21–30 year olds in the region. During a preliminary brand audit we conducted before presenting the idea, it was discovered that there were major inconsistencies in the various representations of the brand. This issue alone was worth a closer examination and correction from the marketing and operations teams.

Initially, there was not a lot of support for going down this path. "We have asked people in focus groups several times if we should update the look and it always came back 'no'". I mentioned the inconsistencies of the brand and inquired when the last focus group was held. In reviewing the focus group feedback, we listened closer to what the consumers were saying — and yes, they did not feel the brand needed to be updated, but their attitudes and perceptions of the brand were clearly not contemporary or on-trend! We needed to plan for the future and for the upcoming target market without alienating our loyal consumer! This caused a *light* to go off for the marketing team and agreement to slowly explore the idea further (*pun intended*). Since there were major trepidations about altering the primary packaging of bottle labels and cans at this point, a secondary packaging project was undertaken to start the updating process.

The fear of change was understandable for such an important product. A gradual updating strategy was discussed for this instance, which called for an evolutionary methodology and not a revolutionary measure, which might alienate the current market.

Outdated logotype

Major inconsistencies in the secondary packages





First round of the evolution —
Secondary packages updated

Before

I.C.
LIGHT
B E E R

During



*Form follows function —
that has been
misunderstood.*

*Form and function
should be one, joined
in a spiritual union.*

Frank Lloyd Wright

Second round of the evolution —
Primary packages mocked-up
for focus group and on-site testing



We wanted a bolder presence on the shelves and store floors. A refreshing look was also a major element that the team wanted to be presented. With those two key directions, I went to the sketch pad. After tightening up the directions in design roughs, the ideas were presented to the team. The six-pack and case holders had a solid black background for its elegance, strength, and depth and really highlighted the crisp and refreshing bright white ice of the foreground, which cradled the product(s) in glamour shots dripping with “sweat” or condensation.

The design options shown were loved by the sales and marketing teams, but operations brought the budget into play. The expense of changing large flexography plates for web presses and ordering a year’s worth or more of packaging at a time for price breaks are never taken lightly. The teams debated the issue and it was decided that the added expense of printing 4-color and 3-color processes on the outer cases was worth the risk and added expense for the intended “billboard” effect it would have.

After the secondary packaging was completed and in the stores, an increase of sales not only justified the initial expenses, but showed the power of a better and more unified approach to branding. The first step in the brand evolution was completed with favorable results. Now it was the branding on the primary packaging’s turn for the evolutionary process to work its magic.

Once the position was presented and the idea accepted, the marketing team secured an outside agency to be assigned to the project. However, I believed in the initiative so much I decided to dedicate countless after hours and weekends to develop my own designs, various brandmarks, and mock-up packages. Even if one of mine were not chosen, it would be a fascinating and educational design exercise.

Solutions

Being a beer drinker myself, and “quality testing” the product regally, I understood how dated the branding was and how badly it needed to be updated. On the same hand, I knew there was a lot of equity in the brand. The solution I was going for would be to marry the two.

For the designs, we would show gradual steps, from subtle changes that could be easily accepted by any consumer, to more pronounced ones that would challenge the status quo of the current market. I experimented with several typefaces and treatments wanting to show more of forward progress and the future rather than the static, traditional ones we used at the time. I also wanted to call more attention to the word “light” and fluidity, like the product it was representing, so a script face in white was a natural fit. The equity of the colors black and gold, coincidentally also the colors of Pittsburgh’s three professional sports teams, as well as the triangle graphic, also a Pittsburgh icon and the shape of the Point where three rivers join, were solid and needed to be incorporated into any considered designs.

I also used the nutritional facts and condensed marketing text as a texture on the packaging and set them in a different script typeface. Subtle vertical lines were added for the “slimming” effect in both the design and the subliminal messaging for the light beer drinker.

The combination of the above elements was experimented on multiple variations of sizing and color combinations. After a few weeks, I thought one or two of my designs were serious contenders and showed them to the Vice President of Marketing.

He enjoyed my enthusiasm, and although the project was underway with the agency, he mentioned that focus groups would be scheduled soon. I requested that my two designs be part of the review, which he agreed. But since there was no internal budget, I was limited to paper mock-ups on the in-house printer. I did not believe that paper mock-ups would represent adequately the beauty of my designs, so I invested my own money to have real metallic foil versions produced for the group review.



Third round of the evolution —
Primary packages mocked-up
for focus group and on-site testing



Test run of the Second phase of the
brand refresh at the Pittsburgh Three
Rivers Regatta went extremely well

*Beer is proof that
God loves us and
wants us to be happy.*

Benjamin Franklin

After



Third round of the evolution —
Primary and secondary packages
in full production with POS



The focus groups' reviews and small sampling groups at key bars within the city all responded with overwhelming support for one of my two designs. After seeing the results, I was allowed to expense the costs of the mock-ups and the project moved forward.

There was still some resistance and fear toward changing the company's number one income generator's branding. So we made a recommendation to do a test run on a limited release commemorative can to test the market response to this design. Since we did these at least two or three times per year for various events or personalities, the I.C. Light-sponsored Pittsburgh Three Rivers Regatta was the perfect opportunity to truly see how the brand would stand the test of a real market and exposure.

Results

There were two SKUs designed for the test run, the 12-oz. and 16-oz. cans, which had the new brandmarks appearing twice on each can in various forms. These cans, along with some minor point of sale easel-backed price cards and sales banners, were all that was initially used for the soft launch/trial run.

The result was an enthusiastic response from the crowds and increased sales from the distributors and retailers during the event, both which solidified the direction of the new brand identity design. Full production of all I.C. Light packaging SKUs (more than 15) and all support materials, including POS, promo items, signage, fleet graphics, and collateral ensued (more than 100 items total).

After seeing an increase of sales and market share of 3%–5%, the VP of Marketing saw that the branding could be taken to the next level and wanted to push it even further. At the time, the largest brewer had its light beer logotype reading vertically (but opposite of book spine orientation), and he wanted the same for I.C. Light, so back to the sketchbook I went.

I came up with a unique color treatment of the background fading at 95% tint of black to 0% on either side to pop out the vertically placed logotype. This worked really well in the small tests we ran to determine the depth of black to be used as well as the width of the gradation. It was amazing to see the real reactions of the people in the bars holding the bottles or cans while twisting and turning them to determine whether it was black, gray, or the silver of the label/can showing through. The VP of Marketing was excited with the market's response and immediately ordered a full conversion to this brand treatment, which became the third stage evolving the brand identity of the beer.

Again, the response was impressive as sales and market share increased! The design was featured and leveraged in the new advertising campaign for I.C. Light, which included T.V. More importantly, since all of the new branding was now being done in-house, we ensured complete consistency and efficiency not just in media but packaging, POS, distributor/wholesaler marketing materials, etc.

The design was strong enough to endure more than 10 years in the market in one form or another until, as usual in B2C marketing, the cycle repeated itself.

Case Study 3/3



Second phase of the brand
update in production — Refreshing!



Final phase of the brand refresh — Cheers!