



Case Study: Burt's Reliable, Inc. – Think before you leap: Reinvigorating a brand, Redefining a product.

Background: Burt's Reliable, a regional, 3rd generation family-owned and operated fuel company traditionally invested in the service and delivery of home heating oil and related products. In 2006 the company converted its entire infrastructure to accommodate the sale of Biofuels as a part of its product line. Accordingly, an outside marketing firm was hired to handle the transition. Following their departure, we were brought in in 2007 to handle all of their advertising and marketing duties.

Challenge: Primary: Overcome effects of previous re-branding effort, which had very quickly sought to reposition the company solely as a niche provider of biofuel products, but with little explanation or benefit-driven messaging. This abrupt change resulted in market confusion, loss of brand identity, and loss of client base. Secondary: find viable means of positioning brand and leveraging biofuel offerings as an acceptable mainstream alternative to traditional fuel oil, especially versus peer-level alternative fuel options.

Solution

Primary: Beginning with deep research into client's brand-history, public perception and previous marketing efforts, we determined that the best way to 'right the ship' – that is, to halt attrition and restore customer confidence - was to rebuild the company's past 'roots'. We temporarily froze all green marketing efforts during this phase and instead focused on stabilizing, reinvigorating and redefining the company in familiar terms, with a strong focus on customer needs. Through our research we discovered that the company enjoyed an exceptionally strong reputation in terms of customer service, and was an especially trusted off-hour emergency repair provider. This observation became a point of leverage, as the product-confusion caused by the previous re-branding effort had caused many Burt's customers to think that the company no longer sold fuel oil that they could use, and thus had moved to other local providers, many of whom did not offer service. As a result, we developed Burt's "Peace Of Mind Plans" – comprehensive service plans that included automatic fill up, free budgeting and 24-hour emergency service. In addition, we convinced our client to offer the lowest price service plan in the area, with a three-year commitment, thus giving Burt's the opportunity to reestablish lost relationships and gain market share over the long term. As part of this initial effort, we redeveloped the company's original logo, doing away with the prior 'green' version, and in the process reestablishing a sense of solidity and brand identification. Advertising and marketing messaging - ranging from print and radio, to newsletter and sales collateral - was made consistent, clear and simple, and drove the company's product offering message home while beginning the education process for the transition to biofuels. Finally, in a throw to the company's strength, the tagline "We'll Take Care of It" was created and implemented across all venues.

As a result of our efforts, the company reports stabilization, increased market share, and a reversal of earlier attrition within its customer base.

Secondary: Once the company's core brand was re-stabilized we addressed the challenge of effectively marketing biofuels to a consumer base not only used to traditional heating oil, but also facing rising fuel costs, a recession and the incursion of Natural Gas availability and associated national marketing muscle into the company's core geographic area.

Once again, gaining an *understanding* of the product, its competitors, and its proposed audience gave us the means to develop a creative and very effective solution. In order to create a simple and easily understood public message, we knew we had to gain a deep understanding of not only the product itself, but also its competitors. During this discovery process, we unearthed a wealth of relevant information, including the following highlights:

- Among consumers there exist many misconceptions as to the nature, requirements and use of Biofuels.

- The fact that Natural Gas is a Fossil Fuel is not well known. In addition, Natural Gas shares nearly every environmentally detrimental characteristic with traditional heating oil, both environmentally and geopolitically.
- More importantly, Natural Gas is ‘natural’ in name only: the designation is only made to distinguish it from gasoline.
- Biofuels are a mixture of renewable fuel (such as soybean oil), and traditional heating oil that costs the same and works the same as regular fuel and is 100% compatible with existing equipment.
- Unlike natural gas, only heating oil can be modified with renewable biomass-based fuels in increasing percentages in order to offset the fossil-fuel content and immediately reduce carbon emissions.

Our research led us to the following conclusion: the prevailing public perception of both Biofuels and Natural Gas was not in line with the factual realities of either product. Based upon this interpretation, we set to work on devising a creative solution to simultaneously debunk certain myths about Natural Gas and educate the consumer on Biofuel use in order to stimulate the adoption of our client’s renewable energy products.

Our solution: LGM creative developed the name Natural Heating Oil™ as a response to the perception challenge of natural gas, and supplanted all of our clients heating oil references with this phrase. It is our contention that, while both substances are similar, only Natural Heating Oil™ has the ability to be modified with renewable biomass offsets in increasing amounts, thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions and rendering it the more ‘natural’ of the two products, and more befitting of that attribution.

In addition, we continue to create educational and benefit-driven campaigns that identify and evangelize Natural Heating Oil™, showcasing the following messaging points: functional and cost benefits, ease of use, no additional equipment investment, generous tax incentives and, of course, the environmental benefit of immediately reducing carbon emissions, thereby making homes and businesses *instantly* green.

Finally, to accentuate the ease with which customers can take part in being environmentally conscious, we developed the support tagline “Just a Change in your Routine, Makes it Easy to Go Green™”, which plays upon the statistical likelihood of individuals doing what is easy first, and concisely refers to the product’s benefits.

Instead of having Burt’s come across as a *seller* of a great product, we instead focused on why customers might *want* that product, the products *in terms of real-world benefits and the ease with which the customer could accommodate the product into their existing lifestyle*. Through education, we successfully demystified the concept of Burt’s biofuels for potential customers, which has resulted in widespread adoption of these products. In addition, as a result of our messaging efforts a number of customers, including some large commercial accounts, have decided to forego the change to Natural Gas in favor of staying with Natural Heating Oil™ from Burt’s.

This campaign is ongoing, and we have developed materials for ‘green’ events, television, radio, web and collateral. To date it has been very well received, and ***has resulted in a near threefold expansion of the company’s geographical reach***. In addition, we continue to market the company’s other biofuel products, such as B20 BioDiesel and additional Natural Heating Oil™ blends, in an educational and benefits-driven manner with great success.