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## **DEVELOPING THE UK AVOCADO MARKET THROUGH GENERIC PROMOTION**

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### **SUMMARY**

The South African Avocado Growers' Association (SAAGA) has been carrying out a generic promotions programme in the United Kingdom since 1995. The campaign has primarily made use of public relations (PR) techniques to change negative consumer perceptions of the avocado and to educate people as to the culinary versatility of the fruit. Generic promotion aims to increase the overall size of the market, whereas brand promotion aims to gain market share for a specific brand. SAAGA's campaign has targeted the upper income group (ABC1). Avocado consumption in the UK has increased during the campaign, but it is not possible to determine what proportion of the increase is attributable to generic promotion and what proportion is attributable to other factors such as "ripe and ready" avocados and increased supply. However, consumer research has shown that perceptions regarding the healthfulness, availability and origin of avocados have changed. These changes are in accordance with the message that has been communicated over the past 9 years, proving the success of the campaign.

SAAGA believes that generic promotion of avocados should be extended into the European continent if the market is to keep pace with growth in production. A PR-based generic promotion campaign, jointly funded by the countries supplying Europe would ensure that the consumers are exposed, year-round to information that will keep avocados foremost in their minds, and thus increase demand.

**Key words:** Avocado, South Africa, Generic promotion.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The South African Avocado Growers' Association (SAAGA) has been funding a generic avocado promotion programme in the United Kingdom since 1995. These promotions aim to increase avocado consumption in order to accommodate increasing production. It must be stressed that in the context of this paper, the term "promotion" does not refer to offering avocados for sale at a reduced price, but rather as an activity to shift demand to a higher level so that greater volumes can be sold without lowering the price.

During the 1970s, the Israeli avocado industry carried out a promotional campaign in the UK. Due to their efforts, avocados became known as a winter fruit, and were most commonly thought of as a starter in the form of *Avocado Ritz*. South African avocados,

however, are in season during the UK summer months. Consequently, promotions have aimed at educating the consumer on the avocado's healthfulness and versatility as an ingredient in salads and other summer cuisine.

The UK was identified as a target market for the following reasons:

- \* Per capita consumption was around 400 g, as opposed to 1 kg in France (von Bach and Grote, 1994). Therefore, the potential for growth was perceived as greater.
- \* Although Germany had a per capita consumption of around 200g (von Bach and Grote, 1994), it was decided that it would be easier to do business in the UK due to a common language and fewer cultural differences.
- \* The German market was perceived to be more price-sensitive than the UK. The UK thus provided greater scope for increasing consumption without decreasing price.

This paper discusses SAAGA's philosophy behind generic promotion, promotion techniques employed, core messages of the campaign, and the complexities encountered in measuring the success of the campaign.

## **GENERIC vs BRAND PROMOTION**

SAAGA's approach has been one of generic promotion, where the aim has been to increase the consumption of South African avocados as a whole, and not the brand of a particular export company. Brand promotion aims to increase market share. In other words it aims to increase the brand's "slice of the pie" at the expense of other competitors in the market. In this scenario, brand A's gain is brand B's loss-a win / lose outcome. In contrast, generic promotion is designed to increase the size of the market, so that competing brands can all have a bigger "slice of the pie"-a win / win outcome.

The theme of South Africa's UK campaign is "Summer avocados, fresh from the South African Sun". It might therefore be argued that the campaign is not truly generic, as it promotes South African avocados, as opposed to avocados from other countries such as Spain, Kenya and Peru. However, the campaign emphasizes the generic attributes of the avocado such as healthfulness and versatility of use.

In the South African avocado industry, grower and exporter brands are aimed largely at the avocado trade, whereas generic promotion is aimed at the consumer. Exporter and grower brands are very seldom visible at retail point of sale due to transfer of the fruit from its original export container. Branding by the use of fruit stickers – as is common in bananas – is generally not employed in the avocado industry.

## **PR vs ADVERTISING**

There are many different definitions of "Public Relations" (PR). For the purposes of this paper, PR is defined as: activity and communications, designed to change perceptions and place a product foremost in the minds of a target audience through media coverage, penned by journalists. In contrast, advertising is defined as *paid* non-personal

communication through a mass medium.

On a relatively modest budget, PR is deemed to be more cost-effective than advertising. But it must be understood that for PR to be effective, a *sustained* effort is required. Short term gains through PR alone, are far less common than through advertising.

The core of SAAGA's campaign consists of PR that makes information available to the trade and consumer press. Press kits typically include information on avocados and the South African export crop, recipes, new angles for stories, and information on health and nutrition. This activity encourages journalists to write about avocados, and thereby communicate with the target audience on SAAGA's behalf. The advantage of this is two-fold. Firstly, an article written by a respected journalist bears more credibility than an advertisement. Secondly, the cost of similar coverage in an advert is far higher. Effective PR should produce 10 times its cost in advertising equivalent in the media, i.e. £1 spent on PR should produce £10 in advertising equivalent. However, there is often little guarantee of when or where coverage will be placed in the media. This is in contrast to advertising where the timing, positioning, content and size of an advertisement are negotiated with the media.

## **THE TARGET CONSUMER**

The Summer Avocados campaign targets the upper income group (ABC1). At least 90% of the ABC 1 group regularly read the health and lifestyle columns in newspapers and magazines. And 80% of the purchases made by this group are decided on before they enter the store (National Readership Survey, 2004). Accordingly, the food, health and lifestyle media are targeted to extol the virtues of avocados, which include: High nutritional value, high percentage of monounsaturated ('good') fats, versatility in culinary use and the fact that avocados are not fattening if eaten in moderation.

Through the media, we aim to keep avocados foremost in the mind of the target consumer-and make sure that avocados are on the shopping list.

In addition, consumer PR is supported by the following activities:

- \* Trade press PR
- \* An information service for the trade, consumers and the media
- \* Assistance to pre-packers and importers by the provision of information and expertise for in-store activities.

## **MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF A CAMPAIGN**

Success is measured by the degree to which ones objectives are met. And because it is not possible to clearly measure the success of a generic PR campaign in terms of profitability, measurable objectives have to be agreed upon at the outset of the campaign, in order to avoid disputes between funders regarding the campaign's effectiveness.

When SAAGA's UK programme was launched in 1996, the objective was to double UK

consumption of South African avocados within 3 years. This target was met. A bumper export crop in 1998 assisted in meeting the target, indicating clearly that there are a number of factors that can significantly increase the growth in a particular market and that the exact contribution of each component cannot be clearly defined. There has also been a steady growth of avocados sold “ripe and ready to eat”. This phenomenon, too, has played a significant role in increased consumption in a market where there is an emphasis on convenience foods. In recent years, household penetration figures have been used to measure increasing consumption in the UK market (Table. 1). These figures clearly indicate that UK consumption of avocados in the UK is increasing year on year.

It must be borne in mind, however, that *PR activities set out to alter perceptions*, thereby encouraging purchases and spurring market growth. Consumer research to gauge changes in perceptions, therefore, provides a clear answer as to the effectiveness of a PR campaign. Focus group research carried out on behalf of SAAGA in April 2005 yielded some telling findings, when compared to results of similar research carried out in 1995, prior to the onset of SAAGA’s campaign: Ten years ago, avocados were perceived as being unhealthy and fattening, available mainly in winter, and coming from Israel. In 2005, avocados are perceived as healthy, not necessarily fattening, available mainly in summer and coming from South Africa. Our message has struck home. The campaign has been effective.

Table 1. Household penetration of avocados in the UK

Year	Household penetration
2001	16.0 %
2003	18.1 %
2004	20.8 %

Source: Taylor, Nelson Sofres

## **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: COMBINING FORCES**

SAAGA believes that generic promotion of avocados should be extended into the European continent if the market is to keep pace with growth in production. A PR-based generic promotion campaign, jointly funded by the countries supplying Europe would ensure that the consumers are exposed year-round to information that will keep avocados foremost in their minds, and thus increase demand. A combined effort, with a common message, should have a greater effect on the consumer than isolated PR campaigns funded by different supplier countries, which translates to better value for money.

## **CONCLUSION**

The success of SAAGA’s UK PR campaign is based on consistent investment in PR activities over a number of years. Increases in UK consumption are not solely due to PR activities. Factors such as increased supply, growth in the ‘ripe and ready’ market as

well as increasing consumer affluence have also played a role. It is impossible, however, to quantify contribution of each of these factors. What is clear, though, is that consumer perceptions have changed in accordance core messages of the campaign. It is believed that a PR based generic promotion campaign, jointly funded by supplier countries, will assist in increasing the demand for avocados.

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