

Claiming

the high ground

by Margaret Smith

In the last issue I banged on about how to go about briefing your formulator and manufacturer to get the best results. Part of that brief revolves around the ingredient and product claims a Brand Owner wants to be integral to their range.

In this musing, I am not opening the can of worms that revolves around making claims that we think that imply that if we use your brand we are all going to end up looking young, sexy and fresh. Gosh if you actually believe that then please don't bother with the rest of the article.

Making (and basing your marketing around) claims may well be a good strategy in defining the brand and what it stands for. It's one way of differentiating your products from those of your competitor.

And, in the battle to get your product shelf space, there is a lot of pressure from retailers to know what's your unique selling proposition – in other words what's your "angle".

Depending on how you define where you stand, you may be building a limit on your demographic appeal and the buying clique that are prepared to at least try your product. It's a point worth considering before determining a particular path.

Sometimes a strongly defined brand stamp can alienate many others. In

contrast, take a look at the really well established brands and that many have very unexpressed or limited claims around their branding. For example the expression "*Because you're worth it*"™ is one that most of us will be familiar with yet it isn't a specific claim about the products (or their ingredients) that the expression is associated with.

OR they have a perception of naturalness or simplicity or efficacy or strength in the marketplace, these notions have been their marketing power, not individual claims. All in all whether a product has claims or whether it just stands its ground through force of marketing communication or longevity, the final product MUST be true to its assertion that it is true and factual.

First there are the new ingredient and positive efficacy claims...

The oldest ones we know are along the lines of "*contains the highest amount of 'transfabulous peptide A' in any cream*". This type of claim has been used since my mum was a girl, and to my astonishment, is still the main tag of many big name products. Each year or product launch of the brand often finds a new ingredient or molecule being added and the new 'miracle' ingredient becomes the focus of the 'new and improved' claims.

The clear advantage of such an approach is that the base formula changes little (and avoids alienating the existing

customer base) while the company stays "ahead of the Game" with new technology, or at least something that looks like it. Just using the one new ingredient can be beneficial, as the ingredient manufacturer is the one who generally has done all the work testing and proving efficacy.

The Brand Owner must spend a fair bit of resources to communicate the benefits of the new and maybe unknown ingredient to the masses. And eventually the new material will be available to everyone who wishes to "me too" off the hard work of the ingredient manufacturer and 1st marketer's efforts.

Then there is the "*may help the symptoms of...*" claim.

This again is an old claim. Like the symptoms of old age . . . wrinkles. "May" is the key word; like a few others it can be a finudging or finessing factor...it is not a claim that is an absolute remedy. However the diagrams and advertising usually show faces transformed in a few weeks from withering hags to spunky pert things.

The 'symptoms' claim is a good one to use for cosmetic products aimed at skin with various inflammatory symptoms, and in conjunction with the latest or greatest ingredient to reduce redness.

Then there are the claims that are specific to a genre that sound positive, but may have a bit of an undertone of

intimated negativity.

These are:

- 1 “Organic” In my world of carbon chemistry, most chemically things are organic. The context that a Brand Owner often wishes or intends to convey to the consumer is that the raw material is organically farmed, as ‘organic’ is often decoded by the consumer as ‘better’. (Anyone prefer an organic poison to a synthetic one?) Organic chemistry is a loophole many marketers are happy to use when quizzed on certain ingredients – same word, different meaning!
- 2 “Certified Organic”, this is like the “Heart tick” on margarine and defines that the formula has been checked by a private certifier. The only hassle is not all standards are the same and cannot be compared, and when there are literally hundreds of certifiers, it can be confusing, and is ultimately expensive.
- 3 “Natural”, this one can present a hornet’s nest of interpretations. Natural in the broadest sense can get you pretty

much a very good formulation and it will depend on what you may pair with it, like a “does not contain” list as well.

- 4 Then there are the subsets of these above, like “Biodynamic”, “Homeopathic”, “Alchemic”, “Wild Crafted Ingredients”, “Green”, “pH balanced”, “Chirally Correct”, “By Women for Women” etc. In this sector I am yet to find “All synthetic”, yet when I do I probably won’t be surprised.

The last sector is the “NO” lists or to soften the claim . . . “Free from”.

These are very popular now. They are not my favourite as they are negative and they get too exclusive and sometimes plain silly – for example a ‘lactose free’ short black coffee. Other ‘free from’ claims can involve materials that would never be used by a formulator in the product that the claim is applied to.

“Petrolatum free” is pretty useless in a bodywash. My personal favourite is “gluten free shampoo”, as this is pretty much meaningless for a person with

gluten intolerance. The NO list comprises mainly of “NO or Free from petrochemicals”, and I find this somewhat incongruent when the product is contained in a plastic tube or bottle, in a carton printed with petrochemical based inks.

However there may be allergy risks for individuals with certain topical raw materials that need to be addressed, and “nut free” is an interesting potential claim that I have not seen yet, and maybe really hard to prove.

A free from list for formulators can be helpful. The brand may have a specific “no animal products” claim to appeal to vegans.

All these claims can limit the buying demographic and bring out the bloggers (or trolls) who love to find fault with claims.

So when we are briefed with claims, expect us as formulators and manufacturers to quiz back at you to make sure this is who you are and that you can be absolutely true to your claim.



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