



OUTSTANDING PROFITS
THANKS TO A HEAVENLY
NEW IDENTITY



elmwood

Category
04 Packaging

Sub Category
4.1 Branded Drinks

Client
Sacred

Design Consultancy
Elmwood

Date
June 2013

Executive summary

Sacred Brand Design



OUTSTANDING PROFITS THANKS TO A HEAVENLY NEW IDENTITY



Before

An unremarkable label on a truly remarkable gin

After

A brand identity as opulent and ornate as the spirit itself

Since the launch of the new identity and packaging in November 2011, The Sacred Distillery has gone from strength to strength. Sales revenue is currently increasing at +77% (from £149,665 to £264,749). And the brand has gone from a cottage industry to a major player in the international artisan spirits market.

Before then, this independent micro-distillery had struggled to stand out in a fierce market. The quality of the product was never in question, but they were constantly being turned away because of their packaging. As part of the redesign, Elmwood also worked closely with the founders to overcome their strategic challenges and take their unique story to the world.

The results are worth toasting:

For the year to date, Sacred has seen an increase of +£115,084 in turnover, taking their overall sales to £264,749 – a +77% uplift. Especially impressive considering the gin category is at zero growth.

Global distribution has increased by +3.5 times, expanding the range into Canada, Japan, Hong Kong, China and 12 states in the US, as well as mainland Europe, where sales figures are rising steadily.

Sacred spirits are now firm fixtures in many of the UK's most prestigious bars, including the highly acclaimed Dabbous (with six-month waiting lists) and Churchill bar.



Before



After

Executive summary continued

Sacred Brand Design

Plus, the redesign has opened the buyers' doors at high-end retailers like Selfridges, The Conran Shop and Harrods, which previously remained firmly closed.

TATE even requested a bespoke co-branded label, and have just ordered an additional run of 1,500 bottles after record sales. Unholy amounts of PR have also been generated by the redesign, with mentions in all the major supplements, as well as in *Stylist*, *Shortlist* and *GQ*. Impressively, it even made it onto Conran's 100 List.

So what's the cocktail for this success? Let's take a closer look. [297 words]

Spirits sales
uplifted by

+77%



6 new accounts secured
immediately after launch



UK distribution up by
+3.5 times
from 26 to 115 stockists

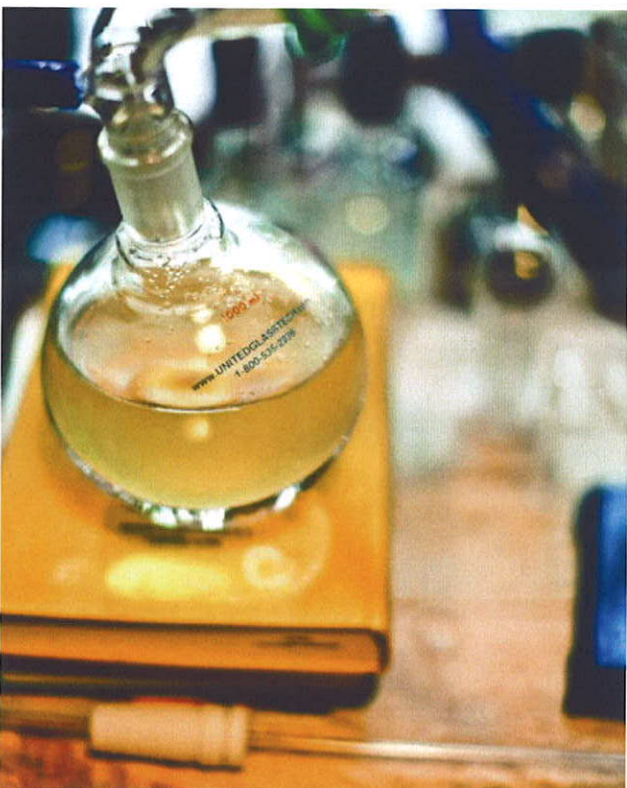
Global distribution up from
3 countries to **14**



Project overview

Sacred Brand Design

The image of the brand was becoming more of a barrier, and he asked Elmwood to help take them to a new level.



OUTLINE OF THE BRIEF



Ian Hart, an ex-city headhunter, distils gin at his home in Highgate, London. His vacuum distillation process means that he can extract individual botanical flavours at low temperatures, making for a gin so good that it won the 2009 International Gin Master competition.

But – having initially been thrilled to have his homemade spirits stocked anywhere – Ian realised his gin was ready for bigger and better things. It already had a loyal following of artisan spirit fans. But he now wanted to crack a more luxury, top-end market, as well as branching out into new regions.

Until now, he'd always relied on the gin's taste for success, and had designed the packaging himself. But the image of the brand was becoming more of a barrier, and he asked Elmwood to help take them to a new level.

Our brief was to:

- Build on existing equities to create a distinctive, premium brand
- Create, craft and communicate the brand story – particularly in new markets
- Create packaging that would give the bottle back-bar stand-out
- Create a platform for growth for their ever expanding range

Down to the nitty gritty, Sacred's founders wanted the new brand to:

- Increase distribution within on-trade and off-trade by 20%
- Increase sales by 20%
- Double distribution in export markets

Project overview

Sacred Brand Design

DESCRIPTION



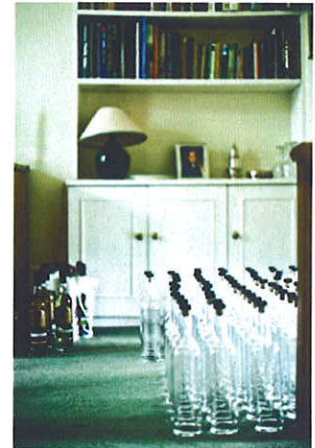
Inspired by our work for Bob's Bitters, Ian Hart and his partner Hilary Whitney approached us to help redesign their gin product. Ian had been distilling and infusing gin, vodka and vermouth from his home in leafy Highgate, North London, since May 2009, when he swapped his life in the City for a more experimental existence.

It was only when a group of G&T guinea pigs in his local pub, The Wrestlers, gave his efforts a big thumbs up, that Ian realised he had a viable commercial operation on his hands.

"This was just before the recent gin craze really took hold," he says. "Sipsmith were only just setting up for instance."

Sacred Gin's USP and inspiration comes from the use of Boswellia Sacra – a special type of frankincense – in the botanical blend. "I can't quite remember when exactly it came into the mix, but I recalled its fantastic fragrance from church services. It wasn't deliberately gimmicky or anything, I just found it an uplifting fragrance and flavour, a perfect balancing note against juniper and citrus."

Ian's unique spirits soon started getting rave reviews on the London bar scene, and his gin even won the 2009 International Gin Master competition. But he was having trouble cracking the premium market, and asked us to help him take things to the next level. He was also finding it hard to communicate his unique brand story (how many other gins are distilled from home?), and needed help crafting it for wider audiences.



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OVERVIEW OF THE MARKET



The last ten years have seen big changes in the spirits market, with consumers demanding higher standards in quality than ever before. Crafted brands, artisanal blends and challenging tastes are a prerequisite for any successful product – not to mention genuine and convincing storytelling around provenance.

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Gin sales are currently in zero growth (Spirits Business). However, artisan spirits distillers like Bulldog and Sipsmith, with their strong brands and beautifully designed bottles, bucked the trend in 2012 with a market growth of 40% (Imbibe). To be taken seriously within this market, Sacred needed to seriously up their game, focusing on their image as well as their spirits. To add to the competition, the likes of Diageo are starting to heavily invest in their core brands such as Gordon's and Tanqueray, through the launch of flavoured gins with more niche offerings.

Project overview continued

Sacred Brand Design

OUTLINE OF DESIGN SOLUTION



Step one was to recommend a new identity for the Sacred microdistillery, which would form the basis of the gin design and any future products. The design solution had to be about more than one product; it had to be about the whole Sacred story.

Immersion

To create an identity that felt true to the brand, we immersed ourselves in Ian's world.

We explored the neighbourhood, with its majestic architecture, ornate ironwork and village charm. We met locals in The Wrestlers and spent time with Hilary and Ian. We got to grips with how his vacuum distillation process extracts botanical flavours at low enough temperatures to keep them distinct from each other. And we tasted the gin itself, with its deliciously complex flavours.

But how to create an identity worthy of such an intricate product?

Storytelling through design

The legendary Highgate Cemetery's gates form the focal point of Sacred's bold new identity. We left them ajar, inviting you in. And to celebrate the botanicals' complexity, we added layers of detailing within the 'High Gates'.

As frankincense is the main ingredient that sets Sacred gin apart, we had to pay it homage. Topping the gates is a crusaders' cross, as they first brought this aromatic resin back from the Holy Land. Look closely and you'll see the shape of a conical flask reversed out of the middle. The typography has also been crafted to build in filigree serifs found in religious ironmongery.

PROJECT LAUNCH DATE

November 2011

SIZE OF DESIGN BUDGET

£14,400



Project overview continued

Sacred Brand Design

The snake's head represents the serpent which legend says protects the frankincense tree. The apothecary bottles depict Ian's passion for experimentalism. The nightingales of Highgate wood are entwined in the gates. And the hinges are pen nibs, referencing Highgate's literary links and Hilary's journalism career.

Ian's mark is there in the hearts that adorn the crown surrounding the Sacred name. The crown was one of the elements Ian wanted to keep, as he'd originally borrowed it from his favourite wine label. Other must-keeps were the ecclesiastical purple, which we tweaked to reference the gin's violet aromas. It's an unusual colour in the category, but one that delivers real bar standout.

One final nod to the spirits' Heath Robinson-style laboratory process, is the way the label is cut at the bottom, suggesting precious drops collecting. The bottom label is also a key area of communication for different product variants, allowing for future expansion easily.

Creating feelings of luxury

We used carefully chosen substrates to emphasise the quality cues. The label uses foil for a decadent feel, whereas both the differentiation and back label use an uncoated textured stock for a 'recipe book' feel. There's also an area for a unique bottle number, which further enhances the 'handcrafted' feel – key to the brand's strategy.

The legendary Highgate Cemetery's gates form the focal point of Sacred's bold new identity.

In summary

This is more than a label; it's an identity. It breaks category norms. It brings to life the elegance of the product, without losing its 'handcrafted' feel. And it reveals the brand's story for consumers and trade to buy into. [495 words]



SUMMARY OF RESULTS



Increase in distribution (20% target set)

The new identity launched in November 2011, and immediately afterwards, Sacred won six new accounts – including iconic Malmaison – increasing their UK stockists from 26 to 32. No mean feat considering it took over two years to secure their first 26 accounts.

In 2012, their accounts increased further from 32 to 90 accounts. And 2013 is already looking good, with a further 25 accounts already secured in the first half of the year.

In total, that takes their stockists to 115 – an increase of 3.5 times or +342% since the new design launched.

Increase in sales (20% target set)

In 2012, Sacred saw an increase of £76,996 in turnover, taking its total to £219,868 – a +54% uplift in overall sales. This means Sacred is outperforming both the artisan market (+40%) and the gin category, which is in zero growth.

Key UK Christmas sales also demonstrated a huge lift of +145% for 2012 versus 2011 (from £29,585 to £72,667).

And the trend for growth is continuing, with a +77% revenue increase year to date (from £149,665 to £264,749).

Global distribution up from **3** countries to **14**



Double distribution in export markets

Before the launch, Sacred was exported to three places outside the UK: Spain, Australia and Sweden. Although many importers had tried the spirits, their refusal to shake hands on the deal always came down to the packaging and image of the brand.

Now, Sacred is shaken, stirred and sipped in 14 countries, everywhere from Japan to Germany, Belgium to Hong Kong. Whisk-e Limited – their new Japanese importer – had previously praised the taste of Sacred gin and had a problem with the packaging, but is now proud to distribute it to top-end bars.

In total, the rebrand has expanded Sacred's export markets by 3.5 times or +366%, more than exceeding initial targets.



6 new accounts secured immediately after launch



UK distribution up by **+3.5 times** from 26 to 115 stockists



Spirits sales uplifted by

+77%

CHANGES IN PERCEPTION



Sacred is now given prestigious shelf positions, and was even featured in Selfridges' 2012 Christmas window display

Although Ian still produces Sacred gin from his Highgate Home (roughly 1,000 bottles a month nowadays) it has become a truly world-class brand.

In good company

Before the launch, anyone who tried Sacred loved it. But those people were few and far between, as the packaging acted as a barrier to many retailers and bars. To be stocked on the most prestigious shelves and bar backs, taste isn't enough. Your brand has to be a treat for the eyes, too.

Following the launch, Sacred has been able to start playing with the big boys. It's now stocked in high-end retailers, including Selfridges and Harrods – both of which had praised the gin before the launch, but declined to stock it because of its packaging. Sacred is now given prestigious shelf positions, and was even featured in Selfridges' 2012 Christmas window display.

Ian says the biggest difference has been people's willingness to place a bottle or two in their basket without trying it. Before the relaunch, he was running roughly two tastings a month, but can now spend much more time at home distilling his spirits, which is where his passion really lies.

And Sacred is also now stocked behind the bar of some of the world's most prestigious venues – places like Dukes, Portobello Star and most major London hotels.

Summary of results continued

Sacred Brand Design

A LONDON ICON



A London icon

True to its roots, Sacred has become an iconic London spirit. And with its story and provenance there for all to see, Ian's sales pitch has become far simpler for potential customers and buyers to understand.

Since the relaunch, Ian has been able to contact publications that previously didn't engage with the brand. Within weeks of relaunch, it was featured in The Sunday Times Style Magazine, and has since shown up in all the major supplements, as well as in Stylist, Shortlist and GQ. Impressively, it even made it onto Conran's 100 List.

TATE even requested a bespoke co-branded label for their shops and bars, and having sold out of every single bottle, has just ordered an additional run of 1,500.

The talk of the town

And there have been some very encouraging reviews that have elevated Sacred's profile even further. Although not specifically referencing the brand, Ian has confirmed that there's no way these journalists or publications would even have been aware of it in its old packaging:

"With micro-distilleries such as Sacred bringing a renewed appreciation for its subtle botanical infusions, these are good times for London's municipal spirit."

Richard Godwin, Evening Standard

"Miraculous...a taste bomb which makes just about every other gin taste like smokey firewater...a stand-alone sipping marvel."

Robert Sandall, GQ

"A real London gin and utterly delectable to boot."

Mia Spencer, Urban Foodie

"...I really do think it is a very good product and I am delighted to see the seeds of re-birth of an authentic London gin."

Desmond Payne, Master Distiller of Beefeater Gin

"Sacred's unusual and something different to offer customers. It's a truly London gin. And it's a beautiful gin which makes a martini that's a bit more floral, a bit sweet."

Alessandro Palazzi, Bar Manager, Dukes Bar



Summary of results continued

Sacred Brand Design

A CONSISTENT STORY, ON-SHELF AND ONLINE



Although we started with Sacred's classic gin, we've since rolled the new identity out across the entire range. Differentiated through colour, the iconic gates now tell Ian's story on all the brand's bottles.

And we didn't stop there. Once the packaging had been approved, we designed a new website for Sacred. Based around a storytelling theme and with a magical scrolling home page, the site takes visitors on a journey – through Highgate, through the distillation process and through the brand.

Ian says customers and buyers are fascinated by the packaging, with many new sales avenues being opened up through conversation around the story. Just like the spirits themselves, Ian is thrilled that Sacred's identity has a real depth to it.

Other results

Although the new identity has opened up all sorts of high-end doors for the brand, we were keen to make sure it stayed true to its roots. Our aim was never to create any old premium brand of gin; we simply wanted to make sure Sacred looked and felt as special as it tastes. And have we achieved our aim?

In Ian's words: "It is no easy task to come up with a new image for a small high-end brand without losing the sense that it is an authentic hand-produced product. Working alongside Elmwood is an extremely positive experience and we have been very impressed with the team's dedication to our business."



ANY OTHER INFLUENCING FACTORS?



Data sources include Imbibe and Spirits Business. All figures referenced are focussed on 2012 data and first quarter of 2013.

Was the success due to other marketing activity?

No. Ian and Hilary have made the decision not to advertise, so the increase in sales and brand recognition is all down to the new and improved identity and packaging.

Where possible Sacred have written to reporters to get as much PR as possible. But on the whole, these avenues have been opened up since the launch of the redesign, leading to greater sales within key accounts and ultimately offering a more compelling subject for the press.

Was the value growth due to price increases?

No, the pricing strategy has stayed consistent throughout. The design has now justified the price premium, but it hasn't resulted in any changes to the pricing strategy.

Were the increases due to lots of new products?

There have been increases to the overall portfolio – all brought on due to the enthusiasm of retailers and the needs of consumers. However, the core Sacred gin is still the leading product and accounts for 75% of all turnover.

Were the results due to heavy promotional activity?

No, Sacred will occasionally discount products in order to secure key on-trade accounts, but this is never a significant amount and generally tends to be smaller quantities. Within the off-trade they have a consistent price that they stick to throughout.

That's all for now, we're off for a G&T.

