



REDESIGNING A NATIONAL ICON

Heineken Vietnam
DBA Design Effectiveness Awards Entry
July 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Heineken launched Bia Việt in 2020 with big ambitions – to become Vietnam’s beer for everyone, across every region and every table. Born from a desire to celebrate Vietnam’s national pride, Bia Việt was created as a symbol of unity, weaving together Vietnam’s diverse traditions, identities and shared love of gathering over meals.

But by 2022 it was stuck, overshadowed by entrenched regional powerhouses like Saigon Beer, which commanded 44% (Source: Nielsen) of the mainstream market.

Bia Việt had heart, but it lacked the bold design presence and cultural relevance required to win over deeply loyal regional drinkers and drive national conversion. The packaging was failing to reflect the beer’s quality, relevance and ambition.

So in 2023, Bia Việt underwent a transformative redesign.

By modernising and premiumising its packaging – while deeply rooting it in Vietnamese cultural symbols – Bia Việt successfully transcended regional divides to become a true national beer.

WITHIN JUST 12 MONTHS, THE RESULTS SPOKE FOR THEMSELVES

- **SALES INCREASED BY [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] ACROSS VIETNAM**
- **TRIAL OF BIA VIỆT AMONG SAIGON LAGER DRINKERS – ITS KEY COMPETITOR – ROSE BY [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA], REFLECTING A CLEAR SWITCH TO BIA VIỆT AS THEIR EVERYDAY BEER.**
- **HEINEKEN VIETNAM’S MAINSTREAM MARKET SHARE IN THE MAINSTREAM BEER CATEGORY ROSE FROM [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA]**



CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

Bia Việt is a mainstream lager born from Heineken Vietnam's goal to create a truly national beer, one that embodies the pride and spirit of all 93 million Vietnamese, across 63 provinces. While Heineken Vietnam already dominated the premium segment, the mainstream category accounted for 70% of the market (Source: Nielsen). Bia Việt was created to compete in the mainstream space – positioned not as a regional champion, but as a unifying icon for the entire nation.

However, in a market defined by deep regional loyalties and complex consumption behaviours, Heineken Vietnam faced several challenges. By 2022, despite Bia Việt's initial promise, its growth stalled, and it remained far behind its number one competitor, Saigon Lager, which commanded over 44% (Source: Nielsen) of the mainstream market. Consumers viewed Bia Việt as traditional, lacking relevance for the modern Vietnamese beer drinker, while its silver-heavy packaging was leading consumers to mistakenly associate its flavour profile with lighter, less flavourful beers.

Heineken Vietnam saw an opportunity to change the narrative. The brief was not merely to refresh Bia Việt's look, but to bring its original vision – to become Vietnam's national beer – fully to life.

A COMPLEX AND COMPETITIVE MARKET

Vietnam is the largest beer market in Southeast Asia – and one of the most complex. With beer deeply ingrained in social life, every glass is more than just a drink: it's a symbol of friendship, family and community.

To make matters more complicated, the market isn't one uniform block. It's fiercely regional, shaped by local tastes, rituals and identities:

- North drinkers prefer lighter, smoother lagers that pair with hearty, salty meals and street-side gatherings.
- Central drinkers like spicier cuisine, which demands balanced, easy-drinking beers to blunt the heat.
- South drinkers are known for their love of stronger, full-bodied beers, consumed in high-energy social settings.

In Vietnam, true beer culture lives in the mainstream. While premium beers signal status on special occasions, it's mainstream lagers that shape everyday life – making up 70% of all consumption (Source: Nielsen) and fuelling daily meals, casual gatherings and celebrations. At-home meal occasions where families and friends come together are especially critical in Vietnam for building everyday relevance and emotional connection. This dominance makes the mainstream segment the true battleground for achieving national reach and cultural relevance.

A NATIONAL DREAM THWARTED

Bia Việt ("Vietnam's Beer" in Vietnamese) was conceived by Heineken Vietnam in 2020 to unite the country's diverse regional preferences under one national beer, but it faced an uphill battle. Sabeco's Saigon Lager, which is deeply rooted in the South, wasn't just a competitor: it was a cultural icon aggressively expanding beyond its home turf. By 2022, it held over [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] (Source: Nielsen) of the mainstream beer segment, with strongholds in major urban markets like Ho Chi Minh City, where Bia Việt struggled to hold on to [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] of the market share (Source: Nielsen).

Added to this, consumers saw Bia Việt's original silver-dominant packaging as too plain and lacking personality.

Only [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] of consumers described it as attractive (Source: Kantar BGS, 2021/22), while qualitative research revealed it felt "too traditional and not outstanding." Designed to feel neutral and inclusive, the packaging instead came across as bland and generic – which consumers mistook as signalling a lighter, less flavourful beer.

The design misalignment became a clear barrier to growth. Packaging — the most visible and consistent consumer touchpoint — was failing to communicate the product's flavour profile, modernity or cultural relevance, limiting both preference and trial.

Meanwhile, Bia Việt's competitors weren't standing still. Many had taken steps to modernise their packaging. In particular, Saigon Lager undertook a full brand identity relaunch in 2019, leaning hard into its Southern roots with a green colour theme to reflect freshness and approachability.

Against this backdrop, Bia Việt needed more than just a fresh new design. It needed a modern new identity – one that could resonate deeply across Vietnam's diverse cultural map, yet unify every table across critical at-home consumption occasions.

THE BUSINESS OBJECTIVES WERE CLEAR

1. SHIFT CONSUMER PREFERENCE AWAY FROM SAIGON LAGER TO BIA VIET BY [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA]
2. GROW HEINEKEN'S SHARE IN THE MAINSTREAM BEER SEGMENT BY [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA]
3. TRANSCEND REGIONAL TASTES TO WIN KEY AT-HOME CONSUMPTION MOMENTS BY [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] BRAND ATTRIBUTE POINTS

The project focused on modernising and premiumising Bia Việt's packaging design to build stronger emotional and cultural relevance. The scope extended beyond the can and bottle to encompass the full brand world — including 24-can cartons, retail crates and trade-facing materials — ensuring a cohesive and consistent brand presence across every consumer and retail touchpoint.

Launch date of redesigned packaging: 18 September 2023

DESIGN SOLUTION

- **ICONS THAT UNITE A NATION**

- At the front and centre of Bia Việt's redesign are two cultural icons we selected not just for their symbolism, but for their power to bring a nation together through design. By bringing together these traditionally familiar yet widely recognised Vietnamese symbols, we reimagined them into a modern, progressive visual language — directly addressing perceptions of Bia Việt as bland and generic, and transforming it into a brand that feels proudly Vietnamese and emotionally resonant across generations and regions:

- The Lạc Bird - Northern Heritage

- A mythological figure that features on the intricate patterns of the Đông Sơn drums of the Red River Delta, the Lạc bird represents freedom, resilience and cultural continuity. As a symbol of Northern pride and Vietnam's ancient origins, proudly heroing the Lạc bird on the packaging anchors Bia Việt in Vietnam's founding story — transforming the beer into a celebration of the nation's legacy.

- The Five-Pointed Star – Southern Ambition

Drawn from Vietnam's national flag, the five-pointed gold star stands for unity among the country's people – workers, farmers, intellectuals, youth and soldiers alike. In contemporary culture, it also embodies Southern optimism and ambition, especially in forward-looking Ho Chi Minh City. Integrating the star into the design infuses Bia Việt with a modern spirit of progress and collective pride.

Crucially, the two symbols aren't just presented side by side, but fused into a single, integrated emblem – creating a powerful narrative that connects North and South, tradition and modernity, heritage and ambition.

To further strengthen this unified identity, the new Bia Việt word mark was designed to complement these symbols — building confident and distinctive equity inspired by the angular points of the Vietnamese star.

AFTER



BEFORE



FROM NEUTRAL TO NATIONAL

Bia Việt's previous silver-led palette was replaced by a vibrant red – the defining colour of Vietnam's national flag and cultural celebrations. Historically associated with strength, prosperity and unity, the use of red repositioned Bia Việt as a bold national icon, rather than a neutral outsider. Silver was carefully retained as a secondary accent to maintain a sense of freshness and accessibility, striking a balance between bold cultural pride and everyday drinkability.

The palette shift was a deliberate intervention — designed to correct the misperception of a light, less flavourful beer, dial up national pride and signal the beer's richer, fuller taste profile at the point of purchase. This addressed a core commercial challenge: standing out in Vietnam's visually saturated retail landscape while resonating with consumers emotionally and culturally.

A COHESIVE SYSTEM ACROSS EVERY SHELF

In Vietnam's beer market, where consumers commonly purchase by the carton for family meals and festive gatherings, shelf presence isn't a branding nice-to-have — it's a key commercial driver. Recognising this, Bia Việt's new packaging system was deliberately designed to deliver standout impact across all formats — from cans and bottles to crates and cartons. The cohesive visual system creates a powerful block effect in retail, increasing visibility and reinforcing brand recognition at the critical moment of purchase. As a result, the design played a direct role in boosting on-shelf standout, driving volume sales and strengthening Bia Việt's position as a truly national beer brand.



RESULTS

OBJECTIVE 1: SHIFT CONSUMER PREFERENCE AWAY FROM SAIGON LAGER

Bia Việt's new design directly targeted Vietnam's most loyal beer base – Saigon Lager drinkers – and succeeded in driving conversion. Regular usage among these consumers rose by [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] (Source: Kantar) proving that a culturally-resonant design can move even the most entrenched loyalties. In addition, there was an [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] increase in Saigon Lager drinkers aged 35–44 switching to Bia Việt — capturing a critical and highly influential demographic in the mainstream beer market (Source: Kantar).

OBJECTIVE 2: GROW HEINEKEN'S SHARE IN THE MAINSTREAM BEER SEGMENT

In just 12 months, nationwide sales increased by [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA], climbing from [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] to [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA], with Bia Việt's volume share increasing from [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] (Source: Nielsen).

Key regional victories included:

- Southeast region: Volume share surged from [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] (Source: Nielsen).
- Mekong Delta region: Volume share increased from [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] (Source: Nielsen).

At a national level, Heineken Vietnam's mainstream segment share grew from [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] (Source: Nielsen). While other regional beer brands within the portfolio contributed to this growth, it was Bia Việt that drove a significant part of the uplift — playing a critical role in closing the gap with the category leader and reinforcing its position as a key volume driver in the mainstream segment.



OBJECTIVE 3: TRANSCEND REGIONAL TASTES TO WIN KEY AT-HOME CONSUMPTION MOMENTS

Beyond numbers, Bia Việt's redesign reshaped its identity, helping to move it from a generic, "light" beer brand to a proud symbol of Vietnamese unity and identity. Among Saigon Lager drinkers surveyed, [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] preferred Bia Việt's new pack design, calling it more "unique," "bold," and "distinctive" (Source: Ipsos). Among the verbatim feedback shared by customers include:

"The bright red colour and white of the packaging stand out more, while the image of the Lạc bird and golden star reflect a traditional value that feels youthful and dynamic."

"Because it features a Lạc bird on a red background with a yellow star and Đông Sơn drum patterns — symbols of our country's long-standing culture — I prefer it more."

"The image of the Lạc bird and the star is the most distinctive, fresh and visually appealing."

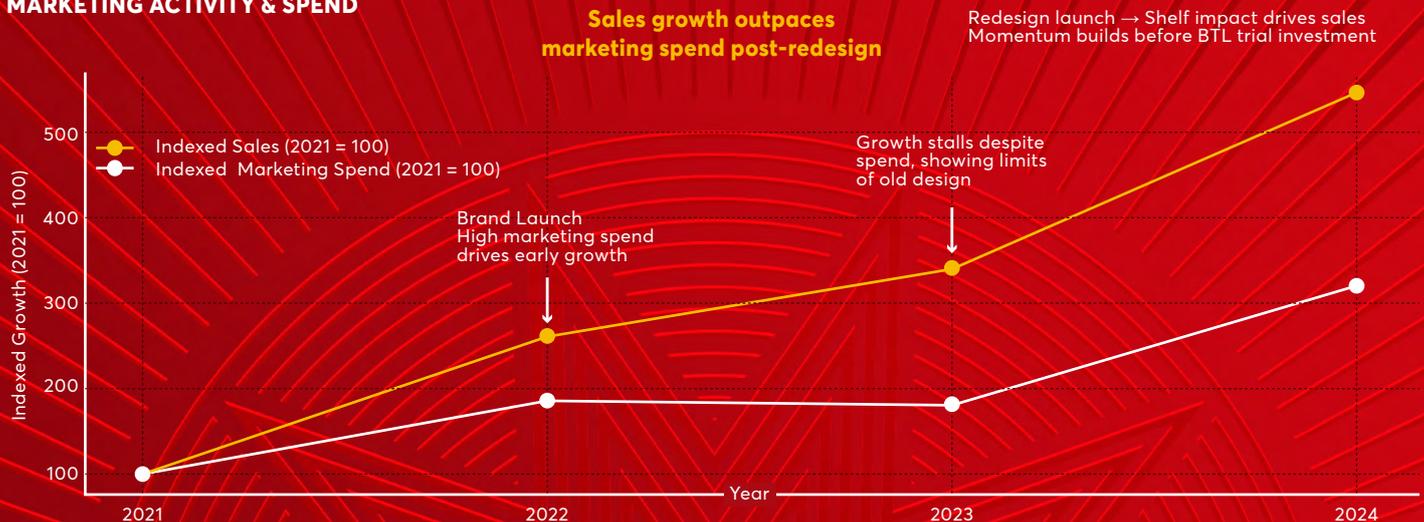
This preference shift is proof of design's role not just in aesthetic appeal, but in repositioning the brand in the minds of consumers — from "bland and traditional" to "bold, distinct and proudly Vietnamese."

Bia Việt's brand imagery attribute for "goes well with food" — a critical driver in Vietnam's at-home meal-centric beer culture — also increased by [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] (Source: Kantar), following the redesign. This shift reinforced Bia Việt's relevance not just across regions, but at the heart of everyday social and dining occasions.



OTHER INFLUENCING FACTORS

MARKETING ACTIVITY & SPEND



As with most beer brands, both above-the-line (ATL) and below-the-line (BTL) marketing efforts were deployed to support Bia Việt in-market across the years. However, sales performance tells a clearer story of what truly drove the brand's breakthrough. The design overhaul was the central driver of brand visibility and impact during the key launch period — unlocking the shift in consumer perception and sales momentum that previous marketing efforts alone had not achieved.

From launch in 2021 through 2023, Bia Việt saw moderate sales growth, largely driven by consistent marketing investment. However, the old design struggled to convert awareness into long-term preference. Growth plateaued despite spend — proving the limits of the original packaging in driving sustainable traction.

In late 2023, the packaging redesign marked a turning point. For the first four months post-launch (September to December 2023), the brand relied almost entirely on the packaging to drive consumer trial and shelf conversion, with marketing activity focused only on creating awareness of the new identity.

It was only in 2024 that the marketing strategy shifted toward conversion, reducing ATL spend by [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] and increasing BTL spend by [REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA] (Heineken Vietnam).

But by this point, the brand had already begun to build sales momentum — momentum clearly attributed to the new packaging system's stronger shelf presence and renewed consumer perception.

This indexed view shows it was not spend alone that drove the uplift: sales surged ahead of marketing investment for the first time since the brand's launch. The design worked harder and more effectively than any campaign before it — driving greater sales growth from a larger base with improved marketing efficiency.

SALES PROMOTIONS

Sales promotions in Vietnam's beer industry are a common, category-wide practice — particularly in the mainstream segment. These typically take the form of on-pack lucky draw campaigns, where consumers open can lids or bottle caps to reveal codes for a chance to win prizes such as gold, motorbikes or cash. While such prizes may seem unusual in other markets, in Vietnam, they are popular and culturally resonant incentives, often used by beer brands to drive short-term engagement, especially during festive seasons or key consumption periods.

Bia Việt ran similar promotions in line with category norms.

The scale and scope of these promotions were modest, and importantly, they followed a category-standard format already employed by competitors like Saigon Lager. While these activities supported engagement, they were not a core driver of brand equity or long-term preference.

CLIENT TESTIMONIAL

"Thanks to the team, there has been much excitement throughout Heineken and with our customers. This collaboration and partnership has given Bia Việt an insights-driven design solution that checked all our boxes and more. I'm proud to say that we have something that really elevates and modernises Bia Việt across both our packaging and brand world."

Anna Bizon, Marketing Director, Heineken Vietnam









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