



ENTRY NAME
RICOLA MAX

CLIENT NAME
RICOLA

ENTRANT
LEWIS MOBERLY

DBA DESIGN EFFECTIVENESS
AWARDS ENTRY
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When it was cough and cold season, millions of Americans went straight to the 150-year-old leading lozenge brand, Halls.

Good news for the market leader, but not for Ricola, the #2, whose two great mentholated products languished on the shelf.

Ricola turned to design, and everything changed.

With a new range name and visual identity bringing hardcore pharma cues into the same room as Swiss Alpine herbs, Ricola's fortunes soared to the MAX.

\$6.33

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On a mission to become market leader in the US cough and throat drop market, Swiss herbal experts Ricola created two new products to improve efficacy perceptions. But when consumers continued to choose market leader Halls, Ricola embarked on a redesign to help trigger a breakthrough.

In a bid to improve consumers' perceptions of efficacy and challenge the dominance of Halls, Ricola introduced two new product lines, **Dual Action** and **Cool Relief**.

But product features alone weren't changing hearts and minds far or fast enough. Cough and cold sufferers gravitate towards trusted market leaders and look for pharma-style efficacy cues. Ricola was not market leader. Moreover, its 90-year brand heritage was built on nature, herbs and Alpine simplicity.

So design needed to dig deep.

Starting with brand architecture, we combined the two products into a single range, and gave it a new name, Ricola MAX, firmly signalling strength and clearly differentiating from the core Ricola offer. Our radical redesign put powerful pharmaceutical efficacy front and centre, and surrounded it with the reassurance of Ricola's familiar natural heritage.

The Headlines

- Rebranded and redesigned as MAX, sales surged from under REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA to over REDACTED in 2022–23, the winter season following full rollout.
- **With a design investment of REDACTED and levels of marketing investment maintained at inflation levels REDACTED, this redesign delivered incremental sales revenue of REDACTED, representing a return of \$6.33 for every dollar invested.**
- Sales hit REDACTED again the following season.
- **Aided in its broader brand efforts by the success of MAX, Ricola finally overtook Halls to become the new market leader – a position it holds to this day.**

\$1

return on investment

CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

The Background

Established in Laufen, Switzerland in 1930, Ricola is a family-owned manufacturer of Swiss herbal products, sold in 50 countries worldwide. One of its most important markets is the USA. Here, the brand is primarily known for medicated lozenges, in which Ricola has long been the number 2 brand, behind market leader Halls.

Ricola's ambition was to climb higher.

The Challenge

The cough market is a category in which second-placed and subsequent brands struggle to break the dominance of the long-established market leader. Research by McKinsey in 2014¹ quantified the significant share advantage enjoyed by pharma first-movers, which typically enjoy a 7-point lead over the no.2. In this market, Halls enjoyed a consistent 7–10 point monthly sales lead.

The Two New Products

To improve efficacy perceptions, Ricola launched two mentholated lozenges in a range of flavours: Ricola Dual Action (launched 2009) and Ricola Cool Relief (launched 2018).

With their distinctive menthol 'kick', these two product lines should have been instrumental in persuading consumers to turn to Ricola for relief even when they're at their most sick. But by winter 2020–21 they were still a long way from being Ricola's biggest revenue-drivers. And Halls continued to dominate.

So in 2021, Ricola turned to design to unlock the potential contained in these two product lines.

OBJECTIVES

- **Business Objective:** achieve a step-change in sales revenue, from REDACTED to REDACTED.
 - **Context:** in winter 2021–21, Covid had depressed sales across the market, with Dual Action and Cool Relief sales of just REDACTED. The expected post-Covid recovery would see sales climb back to REDACTED. But Ricola wanted to do more than just recover lost ground.
- **Market Objective:** help increase Ricola's market share, to challenge Halls leadership.
- **Design Objectives:**
 - create a cohesive offer
 - ensure ease of navigation in a busy category
 - increase standout versus competitors
 - drive perceptions of superior efficacy
 - at the same time, remain true to Ricola's distinction as a Swiss Alpine herbal brand.

CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW (continued)

THE PROJECT

The brief was to redesign the products' packaging, challenging the dominance of Halls by driving efficacy perceptions. BUT at the same time the new design should respect the equity of a global brand built around Swiss Alpine herbs.

THE DESIGN APPROACH

The previous design aimed to bring together the various aspects of the product and brand – herbs, naturalness, ingredients and the promise of relief.

The new design pulled those elements apart and restaged them in a way that led the consumer on a two-stage journey, based on research into audience needs and motivations.

- **We started with the consumer problem** and the desire for quick communication in the moment of need. We clearly flagged usage, Throat Care and Nasal Care, guiding the consumer quickly to their solution. This is not a category to linger.
- **We put pharma-style efficacy graphics at the centre** to communicate a powerful, effective product. A face graphic locates the need and unifies the range.
- **We surrounded everything with natural goodness**, with loving product shots and natural herbs, to show this is much more than just medicinal and it tastes great too! This second part of the visual journey ties it to Ricola values and mirrors the consumer's hierarchy of needs: effective relief first, supported by care and comfort².

We brought Dual Action and Cool Relief together into a single range with a new name.

Ricola MAX was born.



before



after

Design reconciled two typically contradictory stories: the hardcore efficacy that sufferers needed, and the emotional warmth and reassurance of Ricola's distinction as a Swiss Alpine herbal brand.

CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW (continued)

OVERVIEW OF THE MARKET

A highly seasonal market dominated by Halls.

Market Context

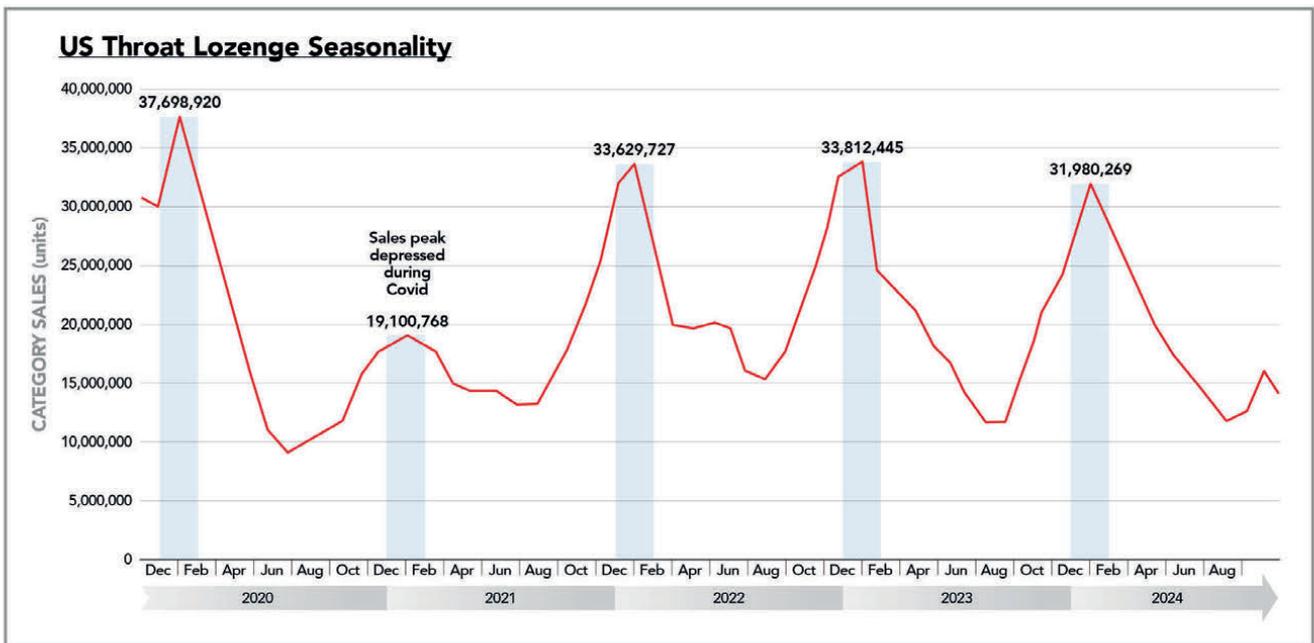
- Valued at 1.94 billion in 2024, the US throat lozenge market is the world's biggest and most valuable, accounting for around 1/3 of worldwide sales. In the winter of 2020–21 sales across the market were badly hit by Covid. The following three years saw a partial recovery with sales levelling off at a little below pre-Covid levels.

Cultural Context

- The USA is a highly-populated nation with an advanced healthcare structure, a strong pharmaceutical sector and high throat infection rates. Lozenges hit a US cultural 'sweet spot,' combining functional efficacy with natural ingredients like honey, lemon and menthol.

Seasonality

- A highly seasonal market, with peaks in winter and troughs in summer.



Source: Circana

Competitive Context

- For years, the market has been dominated by Halls, whose size and 130-year presence give it an advantage over other brands. Ricola was #2 brand, but while it had briefly matched Halls sales on brief occasions, it struggled to overtake the leader.

KEY FACTS

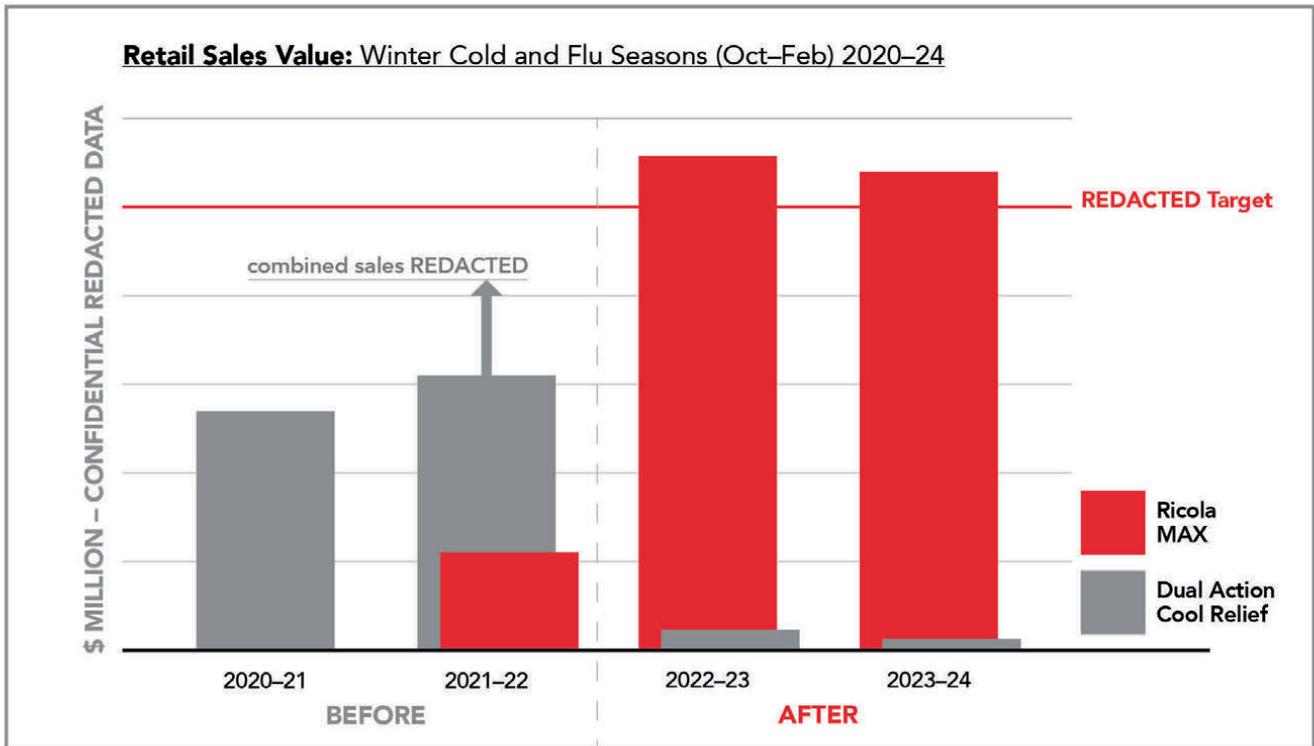
- Launch date: gradual rollout from end 2021 / early 2022, with most Double Action / Cool Relief products replaced by MAX on-shelf by September 2022.
- Design fees, not including production costs: REDACTED.

RESULTS

BUSINESS RESULTS

We exceeded our revenue target by a huge margin.

The chart below shows the combined winter season sales of Cool Relief and Dual Action from 2020, with the first MAX packs appearing on shelf late in the winter of 2021–22 followed by sales of the MAX range for two years following full rollout. In both of those years there is a sustained REDACTED jump over the former levels.



Base: Reported US Retail Sales / Source: Circana

Across winter 2021–22, the pre-redesign products achieved a modest increase in sales from REDACTED to REDACTED, an increase driven by price changes and the post-Covid market recovery.

The first MAX packs added a further REDACTED revenue.

- We set out to achieve a REDACTED step-change in sales revenue, to hit REDACTED in the first winter season following redesign (Oct–Feb 2022–23).
- In fact, sales surged from REDACTED to REDACTED (Oct–Feb 2022–23), an increase of almost REDACTED.
- The increase was sustained in Year 2 (winter 2023–24), with MAX sales again hitting REDACTED.

RESULTS (continued)

MARKET RESULTS

Aided by the success of MAX, Ricola became market leader for the first time.

The previous products, Dual Action and Cool Relief, formed an important part of Ricola's broader brand strategy to challenge Halls in its long-running battle for market leadership. At times Ricola's share seemed to be moving closer. **But each time, Halls managed to pull away again.**

It was only in the winter cold and flu season following the rollout of MAX, that Ricola finally overtook Halls.

In the following winter season Ricola increased its marketing efforts behind the successful rebrand, helping **Ricola widen the gap and consolidate its lead – a position it holds to this day.**



pack-centric advertising

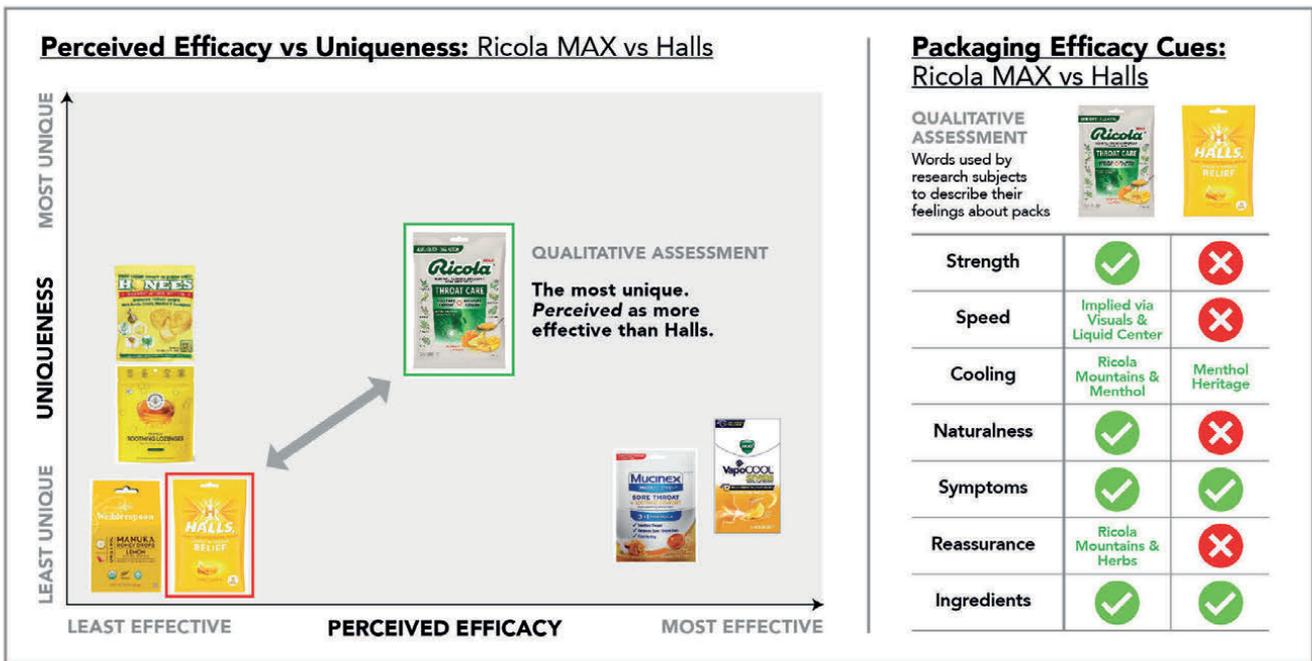


RESULTS (continued)

DESIGN RESULTS

We created a unique design that stands out from competitors by audaciously combining two apparently incompatible stories: pharmaceutical efficacy and herbal naturalness.

We set out to increase standout versus competitors, driving perceptions of superior efficacy, while at the same time remaining true to Ricola’s distinction as a Swiss Alpine herbal brand. The charts below show the results of recent qualitative research undertaken by Wycoff Research for Ricola.



Source: Ricola MAX Exploration, Wycoff Qualitative Research

- We created a design that was perceived by consumers to be the most unique in the market.
- The new MAX design communicated more powerful cues of strength and efficacy than arch-rival, Halls.
- Design also differentiated MAX from other ‘pharma’-led brands like Mucinex and Vicks VapoCool through its communication of perceived naturalness and reassurance.
- Nothing else looks like MAX, talks like MAX or tastes like MAX.

“The new design and branding has significantly helped MAX cut through. We’ve seen a step-change for these products and an increase in perceived efficacy, one of our key goals.”

Becky Spruck Senior Director Marketing USA

\$6.33

RESULTS (continued)

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Sales Increase

- Combined retail sales of the Dual Action and Cool Relief products across winter 2021–22 was REDACTED. The first MAX packs on shelf that year added a further REDACTED, bringing the total to REDACTED. In the same period 2022–23 following full rollout of MAX the figure was REDACTED, a difference of +REDACTED.

Same product, new pack design.

Design and Marketing Investment

- The total amount invested on redesign and rebranding was REDACTED.
- In 2021–22 the marketing budget was REDACTED. In 2022–23 it was REDACTED. The difference of REDACTED represents an increase of REDACTED. In context, the US rate of inflation that year was +6.5%.

ROI Calculation

- $ROI = \text{incremental revenue} / [\text{design spend} + \text{incremental marketing spend}] = 6.33:1$.

Given that in inflation-adjusted real terms the marketing spend was constant between the two years, we can say that design and branding returned \$6.33 for every dollar invested.

DISCOUNTING OTHER FACTORS

In this section we look at other factors acting on Ricola and its market during the period, and show why it can only be the effect of redesign that accounts for the spectacular results achieved.

- **Product.** The products rebranded as MAX had already been in market for several years, with different names and design, and had performed less well. There was no change in formulation.
- **Pricing.** There is a degree of price sensitivity in the market. However, rather than reducing its prices, **Ricola increased its prices by an average of 10% in 2022**, and is sold at a higher price-point than Halls across the USA. If anything Ricola had a price *dis*advantage.
- **Broader Brand Success.** Ricola sales have increased across the brand since 2020, but MAX's relative contribution has grown. In winter 2021–22, the combined sales of the former products Dual Action and Cool Relief accounted for REDACTED of total Ricola sales. But in winter 2022–23 the combined sales of MAX accounted for a significantly higher proportion REDACTED of Ricola sales.
- **Marketing.** In 2021–22, the year Ricola MAX achieved its step-change in sales revenue, there was no real-terms increase in marketing spend.

\$1

return on investment

RESULTS (continued)

CONCLUSION

This case shows how, after two years of so-so sales performance, design can open the customer's eye to the potential of a great product, changing the way they think and feel about it to an extent that adds millions of dollars to the business of the company that makes it.

It also shows how apparently incompatible elements like pharmaceutical efficacy and Swiss Alpine herbs can be brought together in a way that both makes sense and tells a powerful and compelling story no one else is telling.

It's about taking what Ricola had, and harnessing design to push it to the MAX.

ends



CREDITS

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