
Soft &
Gentle

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Fresh Relevance

Title

Soft & Gentle Fresh Relevance

Industry Sector

Personal Goods

Client

Godrej UK

Design Consultancy

Ergo

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This a tale of the transformation of a brand that had lapsed into steady decline and how effective, insightful, intelligent design reversed its fortunes.

Soft & Gentle was the original non-sting deodorant but under previous owners, it was neglected and unloved, with dwindling sales and little relevance to modern women. Its original USP had been the category norm for decades, its identity and packaging looked dated and its consumer base was both aging and shrinking. It did not look, feel or talk like a 21st century brand.

Now, thanks to new owner Godrej UK's investment in a reinvigorated identity and impactful new packaging by Ergo, Soft & Gentle is increasing sales, recruiting new, younger customers, increasing brand awareness and changing brand perceptions across the board.

Arresting the brand's decline is a feat in itself; turning 17 per cent annual sales decline¹ into 18 per cent growth in just six months² is remarkable. Even more so set against a background of ferocious competition, aggressive discounting and unprecedented competitor investment in product innovation, marketing and advertising, in a sector declining in value.

The number of women buying the brand has increased for the first time in three years³.

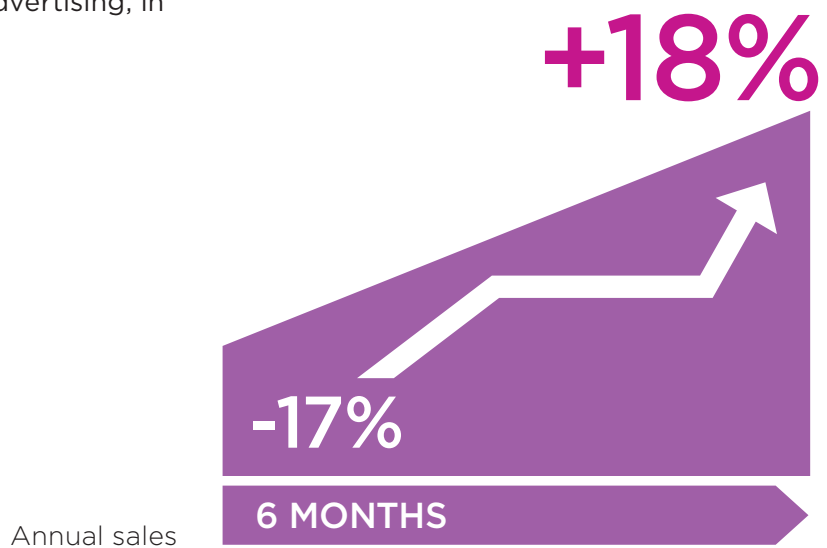
The age range of Soft & Gentle consumers has come down from 50-70 to 35-45⁴.

Spontaneous brand awareness is up⁴.

Brand perceptions have changed from old-fashioned, frilly and irrelevant to modern, feminine and "a brand for me". Women now expect to see it in mainstream retail rather than discount channels⁴.

Month by month it has gained greater visibility and prominence in-store, being moved up the fixture at the retailers' behest.

Soft & Gentle beat its 2014 sales target of 5 per cent² and now has a bright future based on a solid present performance. (290 words)



PROJECT OVERVIEW

Outline of project brief

Godrej commissioned Ergo soon after it acquired Soft & Gentle in 2013, to help it revitalise and reposition the brand in the hearts, minds and shopping baskets of a new generation of female consumers. Godrej saw the potential to harness the brand's strong latent equity and excellent distribution, but it also recognised that Soft & Gentle needed a great deal of TLC to restore it to its former glory.

Business objectives

- Redefine and clearly communicate what the brand stands for
- Give Soft & Gentle fresh relevance and interest
- Raise awareness and preference
- Make Soft & Gentle an active choice; increase consumer retention and drive customer distribution
- Broaden the brand's appeal by relaunching the identity
- Recruit new and younger consumers
- Move the brand more upmarket
- Deepen the brand's relationship with existing customers
- Increase sales year-on-year by 5 per cent in year one

Design objectives

- Communicate the Big Brand Idea
- Create new brand architecture for the range - and beyond
- Design a new logo and range of packaging
- Create key communication concepts
- Produce a brand manual to engage and motivate the internal audience
- Improve brand perceptions and drive reconsideration of the brand
- Communicate "it works" but it's still Soft & Gentle
- Establish "freshness" as a key equity for 35 years+ audience
- Continue to have "fragrance" as an added value



DESCRIPTION

Soft & Gentle launched in 1976 and was the first “non-sting” deodorant on the market, but that USP became a category norm decades ago. By 2013 it looked and felt very dated, and its consumer base was shrinking. It had managed to cling on to the number four position in the market by value⁵, but only just. The “mumsyness” of its previous positioning, packaging and presentation signalled to modern women that it was not a brand for them and even when on promotion (read: deep discount), the majority said they still didn’t consider purchasing it. It was an irrelevance to many and actively rejected by some.

In addition, Soft & Gentle was almost invisible in-store. Despite enjoying widespread retail distribution, it invariably languished on the bottom shelf of the fixture overshadowed by more modern brands.

That said, the brand had a lot going for it. Its heritage as a single-minded, women-only brand offering lovely fragrances was powerful and distinctive. The main consumer drivers in the category are advanced efficacy, skin kind and fragrance, and Soft & Gentle is the only brand that can reasonably lay claim to offering all three combined with a decidedly feminine approach. It had the potential to own femininity whilst satisfying all the demands of today’s user. It needed to articulate that dynamic offer in an equally dynamic, engaging and motivating way to attract new consumers and maximise loyalty and spend amongst existing users.



1970s - 2010

OVERVIEW OF MARKET

The £211m market⁶ for female and unisex antiperspirant deodorants is crowded and fiercely competitive. In terms of volume, it is stagnant at 42.4m units per annum and declining in value, down 2.4 per cent from £216.2m in 2014⁶.

Those numbers mask a hotbed of innovation and exceptional levels of competitor activity since Godrej bought Soft & Gentle. The company could not have foreseen Beiersdorf wading in with the launch of some of the most successful products ever under the Nivea brand – particularly the Stress Protect range. Nor the multi-million pound investment in premium and compressed deodorants from Unilever across its market leading brands. Nor the complete relaunch of and unprecedented investment in Mitchum. Nor even the push by Colgate Palmolive behind Sanex.

The top three brands Sure, Dove and Nivea account for almost 62 per cent of the market. Soft & Gentle is tiny by comparison with a 6.6 per cent share⁷. This too is reflected in the scale of the marketing budgets. Unilever routinely spends more on advertising in a month than Godrej can invest for the year, and in some cases spends more than four times Godrej's annual budget in four weeks.

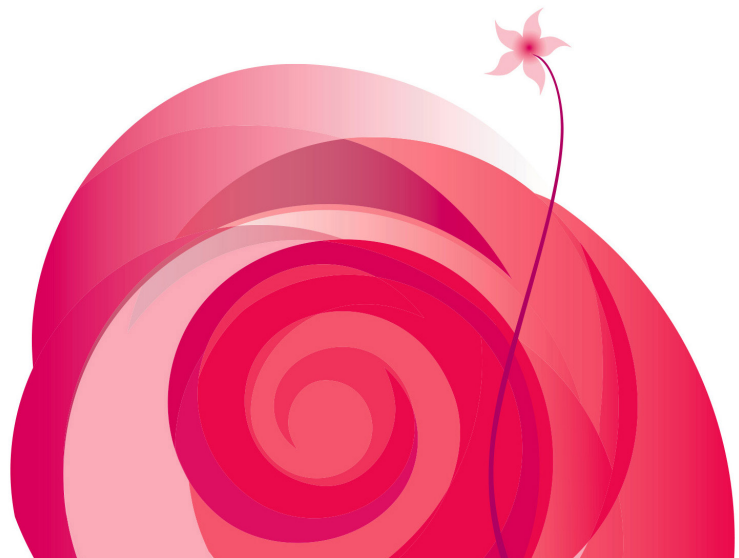
Then there's the discounting...a whopping 81 per cent of all deodorants are sold on deal⁷ with furiously competitive price cuts, driven in part by retailer price match promises and by the continual push by brands to achieve a competitive edge.

Project launch date

February 2014

Size of total design budget

Just under £80,000 (715 words)



OUTLINE OF DESIGN SOLUTION

Soft & Gentle's brand essence is "Composed Freshness", which had to be communicated clearly across the range. The brand offers three harmonious layers: 48hr protection, skin-kindness and choice of fragrance. Each works in harmony with the other, and with the body. The new brand reflects this - never one-dimensional but with layers, working in harmony to create a better whole.



Logo

The new brand marque brings distinctiveness and credibility by carefully balancing femininity, modernity and confidence. A carefully composed logo, notable for its overall composition as well as detailed elements, the font is a proprietary adaption of classical Bodoni, hand-crafted to lock all elements together and provide distinguishing details.

Tone of voice

Soft & Gentle has a distinctive tone of voice that's fresh, positive, personal, kind, sensible and generous. It doesn't use sledgehammer science speak. It's open and takes time to explain things rather than boiling them down to bullet. This tone makes a real point of difference in the category. Competitors say "efficacy", it says "freshness"; they say "dermatologically tested", it says "kind to your skin".





Colour

Colour plays a vital role. It communicates fragrance, femininity and efficacy whilst making the brand instantly recognisable in and out of store. The primary brand colours are cool gray, which delivers an authoritative tone with a clean modern appeal, combined with white, which signifies reassuringly efficacious and fresh.

The colour palette is a strong navigational tool. It's built up in layers from the bottom of the pack using colours of a consistent hue with tonal variation. Soft & Gentle is never monotone and you won't find contrasting colours either - this plays into the idea of a multi-faceted brand where all its layers work harmoniously. The colour palette is vibrant but not aggressive, like the brand itself. On shelf it looks modern, significantly more upmarket and aspirational.

Illustration

The illustrations are a key equity in the brand's visual language, designed to communicate fragrance and femininity. They are deliberately abstract, referencing the shapes of nature, but not literal in their depiction. The overall effect is calm, composed and elegant. There are minimal flourishes. Every element is carefully considered and deliberate. Combined with the colour coding, they help regular users quickly identify their favourite products at point of sale.



GOTHAM HTF

LIGHT BOOK

Callie Hand

Typography

Typography is fundamental to the distinctive new brand. Gotham HTF sets an honest and attractive tone that's assertive, confident, sophisticated and authoritative, but never imposing. Callie Hand was selected for its charm, approachability and casual but composed nature to communicate emotional messages.

Messaging hierarchy

Every pack communicates freshness, fragrance, caring, composed, works reliably, modernity and femininity. This messaging hierarchy is the backbone of the brand offer.

Finishing touches

Soft & Gentle believes in giving a little bit extra so the packaging has one or little extra flourishes, such as the actuator that complements the core and secondary colour choices, and a tinted, pearlescent finish on the cap.

The result is gorgeous, game-changing, effective design that presents Soft & Gentle as a credible choice for today's woman.

(500 words)

Actuator:
this must compliment both
the core and secondary
colour choices.

Cap:
this is the same colour
as core but with a pearlescent
finish and tinted.



SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Sales

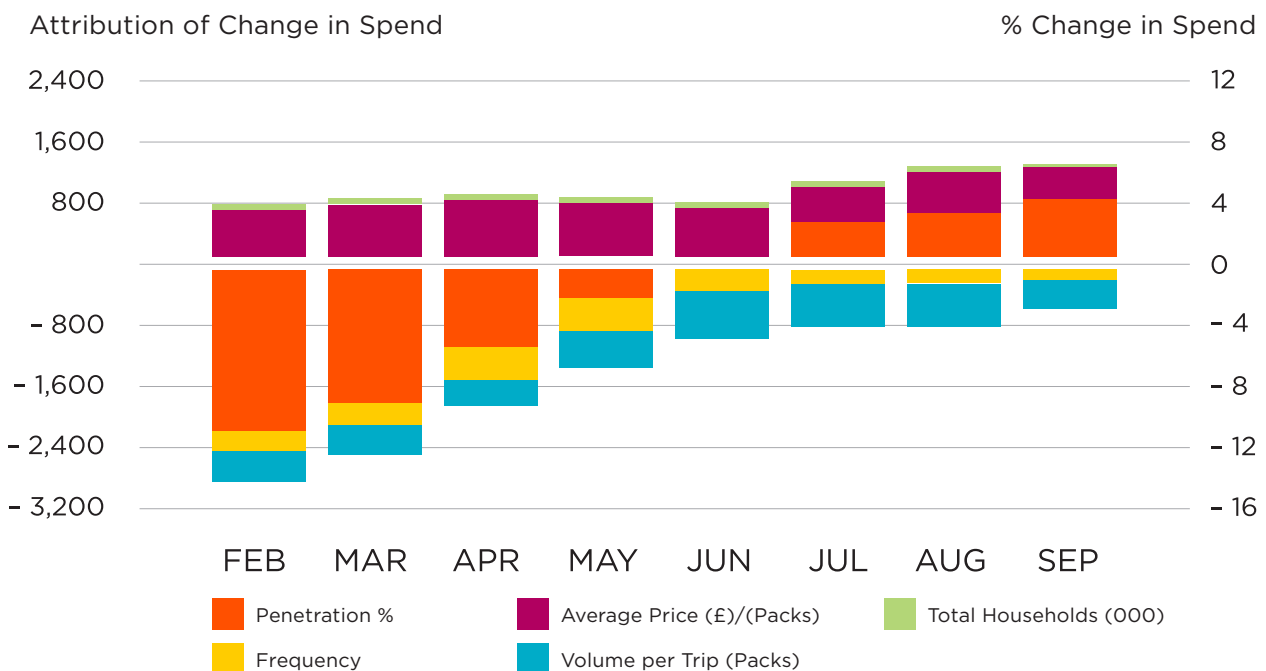
Within six months of going on shelf, Soft & Gentle’s dynamic new look had turned 17¹ per cent annual decline into an increase in invoiced sales of 18² per cent, amounting to £9.3m². This is a remarkable turnaround for a brand that had been in long term, steady decline. Even more so given the sheer volume of competitor activity across product innovation, marketing, advertising and promotion. And all this in a discount-driven, overcrowded sector experiencing stagnant volumes and decreasing value.

Soft & Gentle ended the 12 month post relaunch up 6 per cent YOY², exceeding its target of a 5 per cent increase in invoiced sales YOY.

It would have done even better had it not ended its relationship with one major multiple and one discounter, which had a significant impact on its sales value, volume, distribution and market share. It wasn’t an easy decision to make, but Godrej felt that maintaining those relationships was not in the brand’s long term interest given the level of discount demanded. That decision speaks volumes about its faith in the brand’s future.

Attracting new consumers

Getting women to reconsider Soft & Gentle was critical to the success of the relaunch. The majority of consumers either actively rejected the brand or were impervious to it. Post relaunch, shopper numbers increased for the first time in three years³. The chart below shows massive growth in consumer penetration.



Kantar World Panel w/c 02/02/14 - 14/09/14 W/C 02/02/14 - 14/09/14

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Attracting new consumers

Independent research shows that Soft & Gentle has considerably increased its appeal to younger consumers, one of its stated objectives. The brand's consumer base was previously mid 50s to mid 70s. The chart below taken from qualitative research⁴ displays the responses of women in the target mid 30s to mid 40s age range, demonstrating a major shift in perception thanks to the new look.

Brand awareness

According to independent user and attitude research conducted in May 2014, spontaneous brand awareness increased from 8 to 10 per cent⁴. This WOULD be a small shift for the likes of Sure, Dove or Nivea, but for Soft & Gentle, which had been almost invisible and written off by many consumers as a relic from the seventies and eighties, it is substantial improvement.

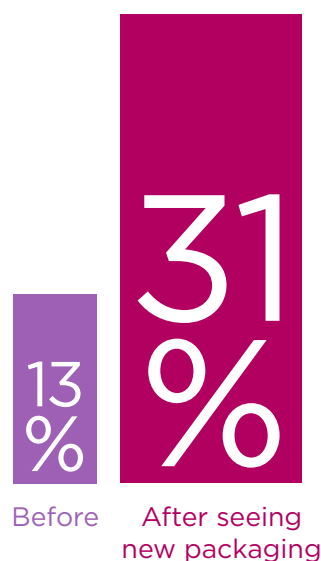
Brand perception

The change in brand perception is momentous. Soft & Gentle was previously seen as something your mum or your nan would use, or that a mother might buy for her teenage daughter. To move from that to "Soft & Gentle is a brand for me" is a remarkable reversal of perception and one verified through independent research. According to research, the percentage of women not currently buying the brand who agreed with that statement jumped from 13 per cent to 31 per cent when shown the new brand and packaging⁴. In addition those agreeing that it "gives me something different" jumped from 9 per cent to 23 per cent; "is a pleasure to use" from 23 per cent to 33 per cent and "has fragrances I love" from 33 per cent to 60 per cent. The researchers described the new look as "especially impactful for those not currently buying S&G"⁴ and it is clear that it had a marked impact on how the brand was perceived by all.

"Soft & Gentle is a brand for me"



"Soft & Gentle is a brand for me"

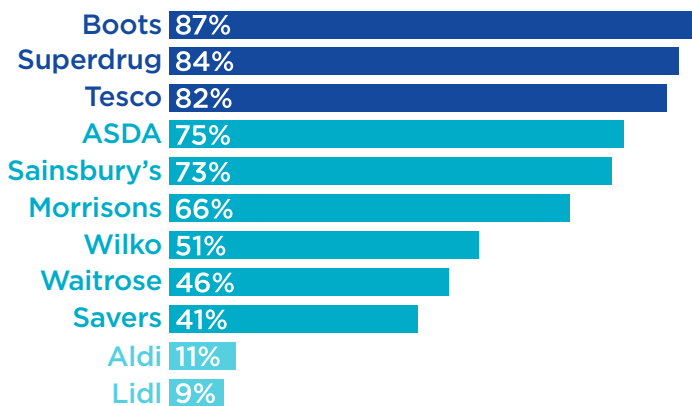


SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Brand perception

As well as radically changing perceptions of the brand and gaining acceptance among younger women, the new look has helped to shift the brand to a more upmarket position. Women expect it to be stocked in mainstream outlets, such as Boots and Tesco, rather than Aldi and Lidl⁴.

After seeing new packaging design, Soft & Gentle expected to be sold in:



In-store visibility

Soft & Gentle has finally escaped the doldrums of the bottom shelf and month by month moved up the fixture to positions reserved for brands going places. It is not yet in the premium eye-level and top shelf slots, but for the first time in many years, it is conceivable that it might be – and without having to pay for the privilege.

TESTIMONIAL



Ergo was instrumental in defining a powerful and motivating brand positioning through research and team workshops, building the core brand idea and attributes, and finally redesigning the branding and packaging. The whole team was excellent - consumer research, project management, creative direction, design, technical support - and above all the strategic thinking. We love the result: a fresh new brand and great energy behind it. We would recommend them to any brand owner needing a powerful brand idea.



Donna Rankin,
Senior Brand Manager,
Godrej UK

(731 words)

OTHER INFLUENCING FACTORS

Was it advertising?

Soft & Gentle's gorgeous new look had an immediate impact on sales when it went on shelf in February 2014, two months before any advertising kicked in. When it did, it was relatively lightweight and for a short period: one four week burst of TV advertising in April 2014 and one press ad published five times in a 12 week period between May and July. At that weight it is unlikely to have had a significant effect. The new look on the other hand had an immediate effect on performance, without any support for the first two months and kept performing for the entire six month period analysed in this entry, which means that it was the packaging that was responsible for the uplift. Independent research noted increased brand awareness, which it attributed to the new packaging⁴.

Was it in-store promotion?

No. Deals are the baseline from which all brands operate and this has not changed in the last year. The category is driven by promotion - the market leader, Sure, sells 86 per cent of its volume on deal (VOD)⁷ and the category average is 81 per cent. Soft & Gentle actually does less promotion at 73 per cent VOD⁷.

Was it PR?

The PR campaign featuring TV presenter Christine Bleakley kicked off in October 2014 ie after the period analysed in this entry.

Was it social and digital media?

If anything the new design and packaging provided the foundation for Soft & Gentle's growing social and digital media success rather than the other way around. The new look has drawn women into the brand, which Godrej has cannily capitalised on by engaging with them through digital channels. A great deal of the traction Soft & Gentle has enjoyed with consumers began with their surprise and delight with the brand in their hand. (306 words)

Research sources

- 1 Kantar Worldpanel 52 weeks to 02/02/2014
- 2 Godrej sales figures
- 3 Kantar Worldpanel w/c 02/02/14 -14/09/14
- 4 Independent user and attitude research conducted by Tangible May 2014
- 5 IRI 52 weeks to 22/02/14
- 6 Kantar Worldpanel 52 weeks to 01/02/15
- 7 IRI 52 weeks to 21/02/15

