

AXE

SUSAN GLENN CAMPAIGN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a story of how a seemingly innocuous bodyspray usage education brief turned into a critically important brand re-appraisal effort for Axe. It shows how strategic planning helped reveal a deeply worrying and urgent brand equity problem reveal the underlying problem behind soft sales. It provided the jumping off point and driving force for breakthrough creative work that left its mark not just on the brand's sales and equity. Most importantly for a youth brand, it became a creator of pop culture for young guys and girls across America, with the name Susan Glenn now a permanent part of their vernacular.

THE CHALLENGE

When male grooming brand Axe launched in the US in 2002, it completely shook up its category with the new bodyspray format—a fragrance-led, everyday spray-on deodorant, with a seductive effect usually achieved with fine fragrance colognes. Its steady growth was fueled by the annual 'education' campaign—designed to help guys understand just how to use this new format.



In 2011, we saw that bodyspray in particular was losing share, slowing overall brand growth for Axe. Our sales data was telling us that we were hemorrhaging bodyspray users from our core 15-21 target¹. Guys were abandoning Axe younger and in bigger numbers than ever before.

Usage data showed that guys were starting to use sticks for their anti-perspirant functionality, and dropping bodyspray. We saw that only just over half of guys perceived bodyspray as a fragrance product². This suggested they didn't feel bodyspray was necessary in addition to their stick deo as part of their grooming routine—they saved it for special occasions.

¹Axe Performance Review, Nielsen, Oct 2011 (see fig. 1)

²MWB Brand Tracker Q4 2011 (see fig. 2)

fig. 1

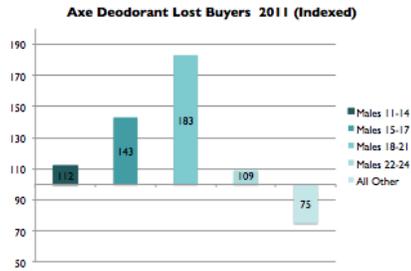
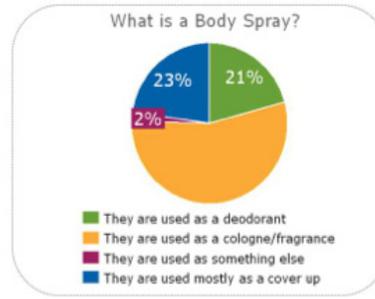


fig. 2



Our task seemed straight-forward—to revitalise bodyspray sales, we would simply have to educate our guys on the importance of everyday fragrance. A classic consumption play.

A BROADER CONSUMER TREND EMERGES

When we started to explore a ‘everyday usage’ brief creatively, the work we were getting back felt very familiar—it wasn’t going to cause a dramatic reversal in the way guys used bodysprays. We needed to get our heads out of the usage data, and re-connect with the consumer and their value systems. Then came the ‘aha’ moment. We observed that, rather than simply misusing the product format, there was a bigger sociological trend happening with our target.

The quest for maturity is not a new concept for teenagers. However, thanks to the macro trends of the society today’s teenagers are growing up in, we saw that this quest was happening younger, and more effusively. Our core guys were striving to be seen as more mature at a younger age than ever before. For these guys, brands are a primary tool for projecting those values to the world. Brands that embody the cultural zeitgeist of a generation flourish. Those that do not are actively pushed away, rejected.

THE UNDERLYING PROBLEM—AXE HAD LOST ITS COOL

For Axe, this meant that the value system Axe had built its fame upon over the last 10 years was becoming less relevant at a younger age. In their quest for maturity, guys wanted to be:

Independent

Confident

Respected

Worthy

Yet Axe's promise of 'spray Axe, get all the girls' simply reminded them of their middle-school selves:

Uncertain

Try-hard

Naive

Experimental

Axe was a brand—especially the bodyspray format—that represented the version of themselves they wanted to leave behind. With-it teenagers were deliberately detaching themselves from the brand and its negative associations at a younger age than ever before in an effort to demonstrate their maturity. Wearing the distinctive scent of Axe bodyspray had become a game-killer rather than a game-changer for these guys. This explained the decline we were seeing in Bodyspray sales.

To stop the rot, we'd need more than a fresh way of asking people to up their consumption.

We'd need a campaign that would fundamentally change the way young guys perceived Axe. One that not only captured, but *set the tone* of the mating game for a new generation through its message and its behavior.

A NEW, MORE MATURE ANGLE TO SEDUCTION

Axe's equity within the category lay in its ownership of seduction—we weren't about to step away from that. If guys felt that buying into the promise of attracting every girl in sight was immature, what if we promised to help them get *the* girl? The girl you just could not get out of your head, the one who made every other girl look ordinary. It was a mature, adult attitude to dating (emotionally rewarding relationships, rather than just numerous hook-ups), that would reflect a situation that a large number of our target would currently find themselves.

And thus was born our creative brief—**Axe Bodyspray helps you get *the* girl you want, not just any girl.**

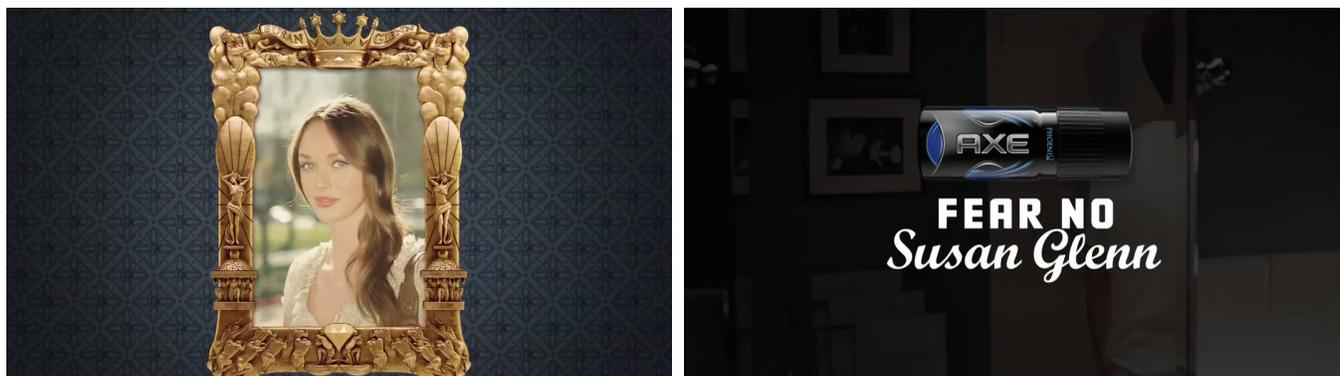
THE BIG IDEA

As we discussed the brief with creatives, one of the copywriters reminisced about the girl of his youth—Susan Glenn. He recalled, above all, the fear, and consequent lack of action that she induced in him. As, we in turn, recounted the stories of our own 'Susan Glenns', the one thing we all had in common was that none of us did anything about her, and we would always remember her as 'the one that got away'.

It was then we realised we might have just cracked it. If a Susan Glenn had the power to render you powerless, then the new role for Axe would be to give young guys the confidence to approach their current Susan Glenns—before they ended up nostalgic old fools like us.

The campaign idea was simple: create a phenomenon around Susan Glenn, then encourage guys (via Axe) to conquer their fear of theirs.

The mantra 'Fear No Susan Glenn' was born.



BRINGING THE CAMPAIGN TO LIFE

Given the growing lack of respect for Axe among the key influencers in our target, it wasn't going to be a simple case of running a 90: commercial on TV. To really re-establish ourselves as culturally relevant, we'd need to build everything around the insight, not the brand. As such, we planned an integrated campaign designed to establish Susan Glenn as a phenomenon within popular culture; intrinsically linked to Axe. A crack strategy team comprising brand and engagement planners was inserted into the creative set-up, acting as the 'third creative' to develop, devise and deploy assets in line with the meticulous, three-stage plan.

1. SEED:

We needed to get the idea of a 'Susan Glenn' into popular culture. We created a library of unbranded Susan Glenn memes, which we seeded organically. These, combined with unbranded media partnerships with MTV, Spike TV and BuzzFeed ensured #susanglenn was very quickly a trending topic on twitter and had risen effectively through the search rankings. Intrigue in the meme's provenance was high, with some guys even speculating it was for a Hollywood movie launch!

2. ATTRIBUTE:

With interest the meme was peaking online, it was time for Axe to take credit. An epic 60: film was launched on TV and online, where an older guy (aka JACK BAUER!) wistfully tells the tale of Susan Glenn.

He finishes by instructing guys to ‘Fear No Susan Glenn’. Audiences were surprised and excited to hear a new type of message from Axe. Healthy conversation in social channels around the idea of ‘the one that got away’ ensued. Guys started naming their Susan Glenns in social channels, girls expressed their desire to be a Susan Glenn. At the same time, additional branded content around the ‘one that got away’ idea was pushed out online starring New Girl’s Max Greenfield, and on TV via celeb Susan Glenn anecdotes within MTV’s Guy Code series. Suddenly it was cool to be ‘fessing up to your unrequited love, and Axe was taking credit for initiating this trend.



3. FACILITATE:

Now that the Susan Glenn phenomenon was in full swing, and fully associated with Axe, we decided to give guys a way to show they had the courage to approach their Susan Glenn. Paid-media banner placements and iAds clicked through to the fearnosusanglenn.com microsite, where guys could officially declare their Susan Glenn via Facebook, Twitter, and for those with the most courage, a (virtual) Times Square billboard takeover.

THE RESULTS

Susan Glenn was one of, if not the, most talked about Axe campaigns ever. With over 725 million PR impressions, 30MM video views (with a 75% completion rate), and over 10,000 Susan Glenn-tagged tweets, the consumer response was phenomenal, especially given a very limited TV spend.

Showing the softer side of Axe worked wonders on the brand equity. The chatter in social media was overwhelmingly positive towards Axe—in fact, 95% of YouTube ratings were ‘Thumbs Up’. In more concrete terms, our ownership of the brand as ‘Cool and Trendy’ in the brand tracker strengthened to over double that of key competitor Old Spice³. This re-appraisal was reflected in encouraging end of year

³ MWB Brand Tracker, Q4 2012

results—overall Axe dollar share increased by 20bps between Dec 2011 and Dec 2012⁴. ROI on the TV spot was higher than that for the brand's Anarchy new variant—traditionally the most profitable campaign each year for Axe—thanks to the cumulative effect of the earned media.

Perhaps most telling, though, is the fact that a simple search for the term Susan Glenn in Twitter today, over a year after the campaign ran, is still being used. Axe has gone from struggling to stay in touch with it's target, to actually creating the cultural codes for them.

⁴ Nielsen Scantrack; Total US xAOC, 52 w/e 12/25/10, 12/24/11 & 12/22/12