



Press Clipping

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After what felt like a long silence, Vaseline hit the headlines late last year, all guns blazing. The skin care brand's moisturising lotion variant took on all brands named Boro: an overarching swipe at everyone from Boro Plus to Boroline. Emami, the makers of Boro Plus were quick to file a case against the offending commercial. What got people talking though was the fact that such an aggressive stance was being taken by Vaseline, a brand that was long associated with all things venerable and genteel. While reluctant to talk about a matter that's still subjudice, Govind Rajan, general manager – skin care, HUL says, "It was not really competitive. Consumers are looking for the best moisturising product in the winter and all that we were saying is this is the best that there is." While HUL complied with the change ordered by the court, Rajan adds, "It's one of the few products that can deliver 24 hour moisturisation. The truth of the claim was not contested." Nabankur Gupta, marketing consultant, Nobby believes such aggression is not unwarranted: "Vaseline is trying to move into a wider scope of applications and has hit a market that's quite crowded. Therefore, share of voice is important. The moment you open out, you need to be very aggressive and they've done the right thing."

The incident is just one of the signifiers of how seriously HUL has begun to take brand Vaseline of late. Known for the largest part of its existence in India as a petroleum jelly brand, HUL expanded its brief a little over a decade ago to incorporate body lotions and is making rapid inroads into the burgeoning male grooming category. According to Rajan, these expansions are consistent with Vaseline's history and heritage in skin care: "we are market leaders in petroleum jelly and virtually invented the body lotion category. We have between 55% and 60% share depending on how you look at the data, in body lotions and an even higher share in petroleum jelly."

Today, Vaseline's lotions business is doing a lot better than petroleum jelly. Apart from driving the expansion of the brand, it is also helping Vaseline out of the rut of being a seasonal product. While the onset of winter used to be the main purchase and use trigger for Vaseline, Hindustan Unilever launched an Aloe Vera variant that offered summer protection and Healthy White with benefits like UV screening and skin lightening. Rajan says, "The data will show we have stepped up our spends. We are using Vaseline Healthy White to

build relevance for the lotions habit outside of winter. The whole urge to care for skin was one people felt only when skin was under stress. But Vaseline is saying why wait till your skin cries for help?"

Vaseline, the skin care brand from HUL is getting a makeover. But the smooth transition from a venerable to a contemporary brand has just begun

SKIN DEEP ON PG 2 →

ACE
 OF VASE

SKIN DEEP

← ACE OF VASE FROM PG 1

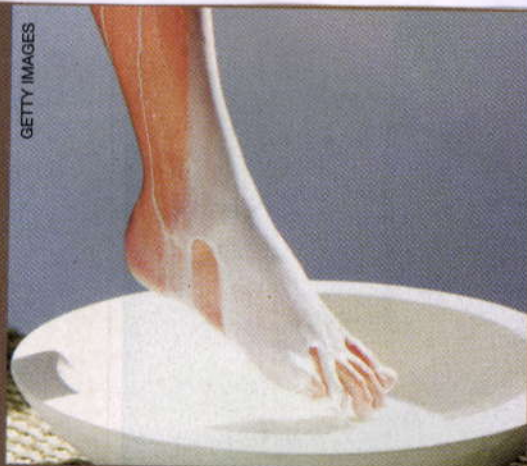
The brand is quickly emerging as the flagship in the male grooming market, estimated to be worth between Rs 50 and 90 crores. While Vaseline is the brand earmarked for India and the South East Asian market, Dove for Men is serving a similar purpose in Western Europe and the US. Vaseline seems an obvious choice for this part of the world given it is a "gender neutral" brand. However that matters less than one might think to HUL. According to Rajan, the entire "gender issue" is a recent construct, created only after companies began to target products specifically at men. He is clear that all beauty products need to be anchored in and start with women. In about 40% of all Fair & Lovely households, the men use the product as well.

Vaseline's male grooming range includes lotions, body wash and surprisingly enough, whitening products which seems to take it right into the territory occupied by Fair & Lovely Menz Active. Rajan is confident there will be no canni-

balisation between the brands: "The whole objective of a portfolio is to cater to different consumers with different needs. Vaseline and Fair & Lovely don't appeal to the same consumer. Vaseline is present across the range of skin needs, an expert brand across platforms and not rooted in one single benefit. Fair & Lovely Menz Active is a more accessible promise of skin lightening."

Between moisturising lotions, petroleum jelly, body washes and whitening creams for men, is there a danger of Vaseline spreading itself too thin? Gupta disagrees, "As long as it connotes skin care in the broad aspects, it fits in. Tweaked beyond that, the brand has a limitation into expandability. For instance, if it went into the perfume or deodorant space, it wouldn't work." Rajan believes in keeping the brand as elastic as possible. He says, "We are not waiting for the market to evolve but want to shape the market. Which is why a lot of work has gone into Vaseline over the last two three years to come up with products that are a bit ahead of their time. We recognise this is not an easy journey but that's what market development is all about."

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