

Publication : The Economic Times
 Date : Wednesday, March 23, 2011
 Edition : All Editions*
 Page : 4 (Brand Equity)

* New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad
 Ahmedabad, Kochi, Chandigarh, Pune, Lucknow

THEN & NOW

A look at how a brand story unfolds through its campaigns over time. This week, it's Lifebuoy's journey that is in the spotlight

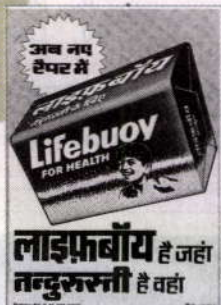
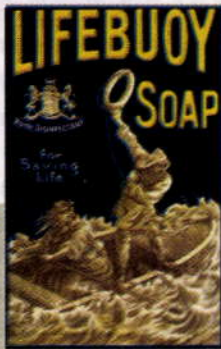
"WHEN you go to a doctor, there are some very strict, disciplinarian ones and there are some who make light of the illness. Lifebuoy is the second kind of doctor", says Amer Jaleel, NCD, Lowe Lintas.

Lifebuoy, for long, has been associated with a big, red, chunky bar of soap that keeps one healthy. The heritage brand, which has been around for more than a 100 years now (the first container with Lifebuoy soaps landed on Indian shores in 1895 at Bombay Harbour), was once touted to be the soap that was everything male and sporty. It has now become a family brand.

One of the market leaders — Nielsen data for the last quarter pegs Lifebuoy at 14.5% market share, a close second to Lux's 14.6% — the name of the brand came from the life-saving buoy thrown out to people at sea to prevent them from drowning, literally meaning that the brand saves lives. A global brand, it lost its original moorings in the 50s and the 60s in many markets, except in India. "It was first targeted at men and masculine health. The promise of Lifebuoy was 'You will remain healthy if you use Lifebuoy. You will be able to play hockey or football well'. It was sporty", says Sudhir Sitapati, category head - personal wash, HUL. Agrees Jaleel: "When it started, the focus was on men as the role of the man was prime. The symbolism of health, at the time, was the huge, sporty, macho man." The jingle, 'Lifebuoy hai jahan tandurusti hai wahan' was catchy and did the trick.

Now, the brand targets women, especially mothers. "In the late 90s and early 00s we realised that the consumer had changed from what he or she was in the 50s to the 70s. Women were the decision makers, when it came to shopping, be it urban or rural. We had to communicate to women and focus on the woman's role in the family", says Sitapati. The proposition of the brand didn't change — health was still the focus — but the advertising did. "We changed our communication from 'You will be healthy if you use Lifebuoy' to 'You will not fall ill if you use

Lifebuoy'." The appearance of the soap too underwent a change. Though the red bar remains, it is now more perfumed and less carbolic. At this point, commercials directed at mothers came on screen, a very popular one being how kids could get full attendance, thanks to Lifebuoy.



Above: Lifebuoy ad(1947)
 Below: The 'Where there is Lifebuoy, there is health' campaign (1977)



Amer Jaleel
 Lowe Lintas



Sudhir Sitapati
 HUL



Above: The 'Active Puppy' ad (2008)
 Below: The 'Bunty' Handwash ad (2011)

Hand wash, an extension of the parent brand, is one of their fastest growing categories. "We're planning to do small films on 'hand-health', we are one of the sponsors of 'Global Handwashing Day'. In Kerala, we have now started unbranded education in schools, saying that "You must wash your hands five times a day", says Sitapati.

The brand now, wants to adopt a friendlier tone. "There are two ways to make people aware of health. One is to scare-monger and the other is to empower. This is the only brand that can converse with you about health in such a manner that it won't scare you", says Jaleel. The most recent commercial for Lifebuoy was one where it was pitched as the 'fastest soap'. "It was treated in a very friendly voice. The way to go about this is that we know that health is a serious concern, but we try not to treat it so seriously", he adds.