

*This article by Heather McKinlay was published in Brand Strategy Magazine, June 2003*

**From Friends to Married with Children: Why drinks companies are missing a trick if they ignore the thirtysomethings.**

Times of transition are times of opportunity. This common phrase in change management can be equally true in marketing.

Your thirties is a time of transition. School and student days are well in the past, though they still feature in friendship circles. Your income rises steeply and student debt slowly diminishes. Yet you have less disposable cash, as you have more financial commitments: possibly a mortgage, a car, maybe a partner and a child or two. Spending money on the right things is important: whether that's sought-after brands that you now feel you should be able to afford, or the experience of a far-flung holiday.

Your social life is changing too, radically if you've got kids. You recognise you're becoming less spontaneous. You think twice now before heading off to the pub straight after work for the second or third night in a row. You prefer things to be a little more planned. You still enjoy a session every now and again – though it's more likely to be that lazy Sunday lunch that turns into afternoon that turns into evening round at your best friends' place, rather than Thursday night out clubbing till 3am.

This is why thirtysomethings should be such an important target audience for drinks brands. TGI data clearly demonstrates how some drinks categories are at their peak of popularity with under 30s (fig. 1), namely vodka, lager, and also shots and RTDs ('ready to drink' such as Smirnoff Ice and Bacardi Breezer). At the other end of the scale, we have the more mature categories, such as whisky, gin and brandy, which increase in popularity among the 40+ age group (fig. 2).

There's one category which has a much flatter profile – wine. The alcoholic drinks market is surprisingly mature and stable at a macro level. Household expenditure on alcohol has remained at around the 4% mark since 1990. As household incomes have grown in real terms, this means there has been an increase in actual spend, and wine is the category which has benefited (fig. 3). Since share of expenditure (and the amount we drink!) has remained fairly stable, the market is fiercely competitive: simplistically, one brand or category can only grow at the expense of another.

Consumers no longer categorise themselves as drinkers of one specific thing: repertoires are much wider now. What you drink depends on who you are with,

where you are, and why you are there: it's all about occasions. Thirtysomething is the time of major transition in your socialising behaviour, which in turn will mean a change in the mix of drinking occasions. So the challenge for dominant on trade brands such as Smirnoff, Bacardi Breezer, Carling and Foster's is to see if consumers will effectively 'take them home with them'. Will twentysomethings continue to buy and drink them as they turn into thirtysomethings and more of their alcohol consumption shifts to being at home? Or will they just open a bottle of wine?

If they do turn to wine, what chance is there for brands in the more mature categories to find a place in the repertoire of thirtysomethings? If brands such as Gordon's, The Famous Grouse, Bell's and Martell miss this opportunity to win over consumers, wine will become increasingly dominant. The thirtysomethings could already be dubbed the 'wine generation'. For many other drinks brands, they could easily become the lost generation.

Brands such as Smirnoff, Carling and Bacardi Breezer rely heavily on TV advertising, sponsorship and sales promotion predominantly aimed at the 18-30 target audience. Quite rightly they aim to capitalise on being in fashion. But what are they doing to ensure that their twentysomethings turning into thirtysomethings will keep them in their repertoire as their drinking and socialising behaviour changes?

The more 'mature' brands on the other hand are faced with the need for substantial investment if they are to challenge thirtysomethings' preconceptions. Bell's with Jools Holland, Gordon's with Ice Chess and Drambuie with the waiting taxi driver are all endeavouring to do so through their TV advertising. They also have to tread a fine line so as not to alienate older, more loyal consumers who still account for the majority of their sales volume.

Direct marketing as a channel offers excellent opportunities to engage thirtysomethings. Guinness has built an extensive database and their DM has been instrumental in turning Saint Patrick's Day into a major social event in the UK. Jack Daniel's has run a successful programme over the years to capitalise on the popularity of the brand, engage drinkers in dialogue and encourage greater involvement with the heritage and authenticity of the brand.

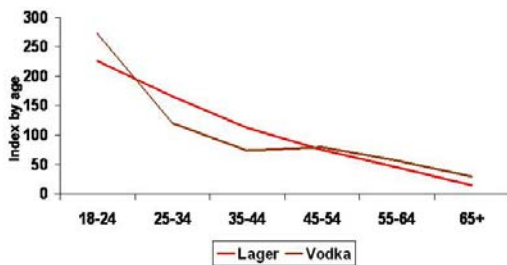
Drambuie's direct marketing has successfully targeted thirtysomethings. The brand has quite broad appeal and acceptability, one of the few with a 50/50 male/female split. However, it has struggled to build volume from its position in the 'liqueur ghetto'. The focus is to position it as a drink to round off a great evening with friends, not only at Christmas and on extra special occasions.

Tasting research has proven that the best way to drink Drambuie is with ice. So this was the message conveyed to the thirtysomething target audience on the database last June. A very literal (and appropriate!) interpretation of the creative

brief resulted in the Break the Ice communication, sending a Drambuie branded ice cube tray at a time of year not normally associated with drinking the brand (figs 4a, 4b). This had a tremendous impact on spontaneous awareness (fig. 5), key brand health measures (fig. 6) and actual drinking behaviour. This was followed up at Christmas by a fascinating facts booklet (fig. 7), engaging this target audience with a rather quirky trivia quiz which they could (and did) use as part of their Christmas entertaining. The specific impact on behaviour was to double volume among the target segment, through a combination of more consumers drinking the brand, and existing consumers drinking more glasses (fig. 8).

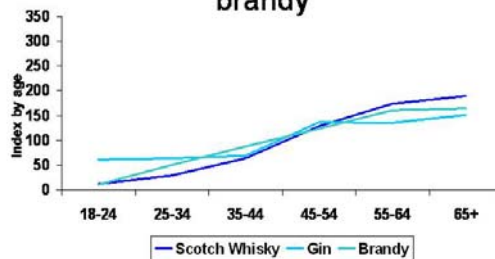
These results demonstrate that specifically targeting thirtysomethings can influence both attitudes and actual behaviour. At a time of major transition in consumer drinking behaviour, and with an ageing population, it's an opportunity which drinks brands cannot afford to ignore.

**Fig 1**  
Twentysomethings = lager, vodka



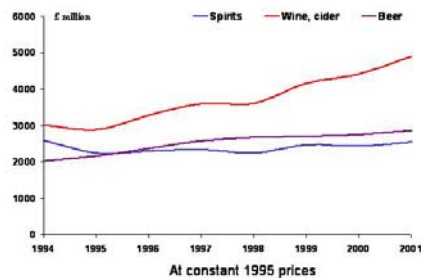
Source: TGI heavy users

**Fig 2**  
Fiftysomethings = whisky, gin, brandy



Source: TGI heavy users

**Fig 3**  
Household expenditure on alcohol



Source: Consumer Trends/ONS/Vision  
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**Fig 4a**

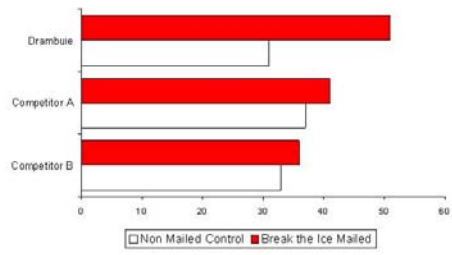


Fig 4b



Fig 5

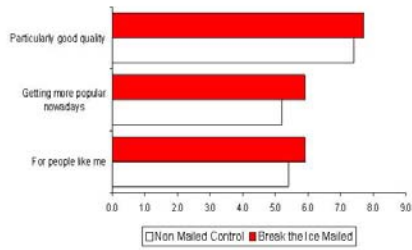
### Spontaneous brand awareness



Source: Independent telephone tracking research

Fig 6

### Drambuie attitudinal statements



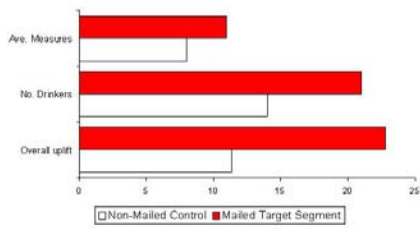
Source: Independent telephone tracking research

Fig 7



Fig 8

### Drinking Drambuie in last 4 weeks



Source: Independent telephone tracking research