

## The science bit...

**Liz Tinlin outlines the new challenge for marketers: translating scientific jargon into messages that consumers can understand**



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FMCG marketing used to be straightforward. Pick a functional claim that is motivating, ownable and relevant to your audience, and talk about it a lot – ‘the whitest whites’, ‘the creamiest taste’, ‘made with real fruit’. Then concentrate on building a brand image that resonates with your target consumer.

But along with increased accountability, an explosion of choice, shrinking budgets, brand rationalisations and centralisation of marketing strategy, another shift has occurred.

Now we are hearing about provitamins, isotonic drinks, xylitol, and even L-casei immunitas – that most unlikely of consumer lingo. Rather than being just in clothes (Lycra) or homeware (Teflon), the ‘science stuff’ is in our food, our drinks, our grocery essentials.

What began as a creep of science into marketing speak is becoming a flood. With the pressure for ever-more differentiated innovation and advertising claims that can be defended in front of the Advertising Standards Authority, it seems that the need for ownable science-based product claims is here to stay.

### The marketers' challenge

So how do we, as marketers, deal with science – in our concepts, in our pack claims, in our advertising? How do we learn to understand and leverage product ingredients that even a Latin professor would struggle to pronounce?

There are two approaches: either you listen to consumers and write a brief to R&D to find new ways to deliver ‘whiter whites’ or ‘crunchier when dunked’, or you

#### Top 10 principles

- Know your audience
- Build on what they know
- Focus on a consumer relevant benefit
- Get creative
- Use science language sparingly
- Optimise naming
- Seek proof
- Avoid side effects
- Road-test it
- Use 360-degree marketing

wait for a serendipitous discovery by R&D, relaunch with their new formula and the claim they tell you Regulatory Affairs has approved.

But there is also a third way: to embrace the role of the marketer as a translator of functional features into benefits that the consumer finds simple to understand. This means that we cannot just sit back and take what R&D tells us. Nor can we stick with what the consumers say they want. Neither of those will create real differentiation for our brands.

The goal is to innovate around product claims, to get ‘down and dirty’ with the science behind your product so that you can come up with innovative ways to express that science and connect with the consumer, create a sense of ‘wow’ and build a connection that turns into desire.

Some brands are already on the right road, and we can learn from them...

**Brands that make it simple:** they make an existing product claim much more consumer-friendly.

- Johnson's Baby Shampoo: talks of ‘as gentle to the eyes as water’, not just ‘pH neutral’, to substantiate its ‘No More Tears’ strapline.
- Shreddies breakfast cereal: ‘releasing energy slowly’, rather than ‘made with complex carbohydrates’.
- Yakult probiotic drink: made with ‘friendly bacteria’, not ‘Lactobacillus casei Shirota’.

**Brands that make it better:** they apply science to solving big consumer needs, but then leave the science in the lab.

- The ‘widget’ revolution in beer: simply explained, no scientific waffle.
- Frizz Ease: focusing on hair benefit, not the science in the product.

**Brands that know their enemy:** they take an ‘anti-science’

approach to champion consumer simplicity.

- Anchor Spreadable: ‘unless you like eating colouring E160a and emulsifier E471, maybe you could do with a change’.
- Birds Eye: ‘we don’t play with our food’.

### Justifying scientific language

What about all the brands that do use the scientific jargon? This is where the real challenge lies – to strike the delicate balance of simple, but worthwhile consumer claims.

There are many reasons used to justify scientific language, but only three reasons make for good marketing:

1. If it is an evocative name that helps the consumer understand what the benefit is (eg Nutrileum for anti-frizz effect – L’Oréal Elvive).
2. If your target market already recognises these kinds of terms and expects that level of explanation (eg ‘contains a gentle probiotic for kids’ – Munch Bunch Drinky Plus).
3. If you are creating a new type of claim and consumers need a ‘credibility assurance’ beyond the benefit, and it would make sense to ‘educated’ consumers (eg ‘replaces essential salts encouraging better hydration’ – Lucozade Sport Hydroactive).

And here are the reasons that do not stand up in court:

1. “We’re required by law to state the active ingredient.” Great, but it is not the claim. Put it on the back of the pack (eg phenylalanine in drinks).
2. “It sounds ‘scientific’ and so reinforces our claim.” Since when has giving out useless information been good marketing? (Eg salicylic acid in skin care, not something consumers know about.)



Good science: Johnsons Baby Shampoo and L’Oréal Elvive shampoo

3. “Our competitors say it so we should.” Only valid if consumers already understand it.

4. “We got good clinical trial results on this ingredient, so people should find it motivating”. What is in it for the consumer? Maybe no one cares.

In most cases, the science behind functional differentiation can remain hidden: consumers do not need to know how it happens, they are not interested. This works if the end benefit is clear and credible and instantly motivating, no questions asked. We do not care how our cold beer happens, as long as it does.

However, in many cases the credibility is just not there, as consumers evaluate products based on their current frame of reference of what is achievable, and easily disbelieve loose claims on the basis of their previous experience.

So it is not enough to just say – or imply – that yoghurts are good for you, or this shampoo makes your hair shiny, or this cereal will help your heart. Consumers tune out to all these claims. Brands are left with the challenge of introducing new exciting benefits to grab consumers’ attention. And with these new benefits comes the credibility hurdle.

### Call to action

For marketers then, the challenge is clear: get close to your consumers and the science that makes your products work. Fuse them to create innovative and differentiating new benefits, and most importantly, be the translator to make these clear, simple and motivating to your consumers. Building this

flow – from scientific truth to the consumer’s cupboard – is the key to building desire for your brands, today, and tomorrow.

#### The FMCG marketing world has evolved...

|                                   | 1980s                                    | 1990s                               | 2000s                                  |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>The message:</b>               | Product function<br>(eg ‘whiter whites’) | Emotional image<br>(eg ‘best mum’)  | Product as hero<br>(eg ‘dirt is good’) |
| <b>The marketer’s priorities:</b> | Spending<br>Diversification              | Media efficiency<br>Rationalisation | Innovation<br>Accountability           |