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## RetailWire DISCUSSIONS

Hot Issue: Brand Image

### 4/10/07 BrainTrust Query: How will consumers respond to BP's Gutsy New Marketing Campaign?

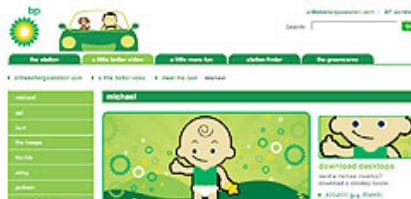
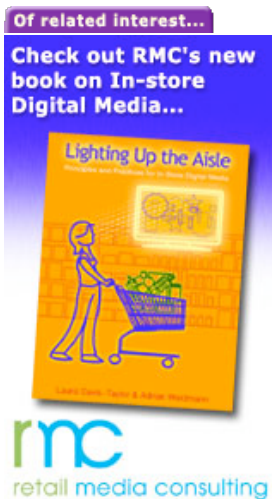
By [Laura Davis-Taylor](#), Founder and Principal, Retail Media Consulting

Last week, BP unveiled a \$36 million marketing campaign dubbed "Helios Power" focused on going back to its roots and making drivers' gas station experience 'a little better.' It's a vast departure from anything seen from traditional oil company marketing, particularly considering that BP has not advertised their retail sites in over a decade.

Rather than traditional awareness marketing, BP hopes to renew their commitment to their customers by making a promise for a better site experience. They hope this goal will be believed - and achieved - by creating an emotional connection with their customers.

According to BP, this is done by showcasing concepts such as 'bold,' 'green' and 'real' - bold in its creative execution, green for its focus on environmental and real because the promise comes to life with the BP gas station experience.

Helios Power targets married/single 22- to 44-year-olds, with 60 percent having at least one child living at home. With this in mind, they bypassed actors and created



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hard-to-resist animated characters, each unique in name, personality and background. This cast includes

Beeps, which are lean, mean

cleaning machines for the BP site, as well as Jackson, a veteran show biz dog that was supposed to host his own late night show but the network chickened out and hired a human! Sal is a baby with a thirst for life, the road and bass guitar, while Burt and the Lighthouse Family are happy BP customers delighted that their day was made 'a little better' due to their experience at BP.

The campaign launched in Times Square with 35-story high billboard as well as with the creation of the website, [www.alittlebettergasstation.com](http://www.alittlebettergasstation.com). The site brings the cast of characters together by featuring them in engaging interactives and stories. This includes downloadable ring tones, "webisodes," a Gas Mania video game and sweepstakes, screen savers, computer wallpapers and even "baby mail", where you can send an email to a friend with a message from one of the baby characters.

Careful focus was put on the store, where point-of-purchase includes monthly in-store giveaways such as packets of sunflower seeds bearing the message, "Plant a sunflower and make the world a little brighter" in April, trading cards featuring the BP characters and a trading card wallet giveaways in May, and children's travel activity books featuring the animated characters in June.

"With the 'Helios Power' campaign, we hope to further connect with consumers and encourage them to turn into a BP retail site, where we're trying to make things 'a little better,'" Linda Bartman, BP's marketing communications manager, told *Convenience Store News*.

**Discussion Questions: After not advertising for their retail sites for 10 years, how will BP's new campaign play with consumers? What does this say about gas station advertising? What does this say about integrated marketing campaigns in general?**

I admire this effort greatly, as the commitment and belief in the "making things better" goal for this campaign are evident. It could not have been easy to convince the powers that be to make such a bold brand statement with this endeavor. Nor could it have been easy to get all internal (and external!) teams to play nice together and bring it to life in every channel. It's fun, creative, engaging, integrated and, most of all, meaningful to the customer because it promises something not easy to deliver - we care.

I know we are going to get comments about last year's PR disaster, but looking at their eco efforts at [www.thegreencurve.com](http://www.thegreencurve.com), at least they're trying. The "Helios House," a living lab that uses green, eco-friendly innovation to create a better gas station, showcases this effort. They don't claim to have the answers, but they do say they aim to keep at it and "it reflects our belief that small steps in the right direction can make a difference."

In my mind, this campaign and the associated elements ring true in their authenticity. They also show us that it is possible to break through the old school norms and connect with people by empathetically trying to make a difference rather than just a buck. Yes, we now have to watch and see if the promises will be delivered. But, as they state, their small steps towards change are worth being acknowledged!



**BrainTrust Query: How will consumers respond to BP's Gutsy New Marketing Campaign?**

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New Marketing for New Media

- **A little better gas station - BP**
- **The Green Curve - BP**
- **BP Powers Up New Marketing Campaign - Convenience Store News**

**What are your thoughts on this subject?**  
**Take the Poll - Results delayed by 15 minutes.**



**On a scale of 1 (Not believable) to 5 (Highly believable), how will BP's promise of 'a little better' resonate in the minds of consumers?**

Five - Highly believable (**10%**)

Four (**50%**)

Three (**30%**)

Two (**10%**)

One - Not believable (**0%**)

Don't know/no opinion (**0%**)

### **Comments... Send in Yours!**

Excuse me, is this the same BP that in March of 2006 had the largest oil spill in the history of the Alaskan Pipeline that led to criminal investigations into the lack of maintenance on their corroded pipes? I agree the advertising campaign is exciting, but I also believe it must have come after a lot of corporate soul searching.

<http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=13688>

**BrainTrust Profile** [Bill Bittner, President, BWH Consulting](#)

BP's Helios campaign is spending 12 cents per American to advertise itself. BP's total sales (worldwide) = \$245 billion. \$36 million isn't much compared to BP's sales or what a media campaign requires to be meaningful. Furthermore, although BP hasn't been buying media, they certainly have been advertising, because every gas station has branded signage making a daily

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#### **Oral Care Category Strategies**

Part 3: Sell More by Stocking Less

statement. And every gas station visit also makes an impact. It's hard to seem different when you aren't. BP stations and convenience stores are the same as most other brands. A packet of seeds doesn't seem like a wallop.

**BrainTrust Profile** [Mark Lilien, Consultant, Retail Technology Group](#)

This is a poor marketing decision. Gasoline is a mature, commoditized product. Consumers have proven time and again that they are price sensitive and will switch over a penny's difference. That a major oil company doesn't recognize this is a fault of their marketing organizations and internal communications. This is clearly a gaffe that BP will regret in the future as their shareholders hold them to a higher standard. Instead, they should be focused on maximizing their abilities to deliver oil at the most efficient prices, increasing their margins and discovering new sources of oil.

**BrainTrust Profile** [Kai Clarke, President, Miraclebeam Products, Inc.](#)

This is a nice try but looking at the fact that the American Public gets hit with over 2,500 marketing messages a day and doesn't believe over 80% of them, I think the message is great but the talk is cheap.

What are they doing to walk the talk? They are entertaining and cute but if they don't follow up with real change they wasted a lot of money.

The best way to kill a bad product is to sell it.

**BrainTrust Profile** [Mel Kleiman, President, Humetrics, LP, a division of Deploy Solutions](#)

Without knowing the media selected, it's impossible to calculate the reach and frequency generated by the \$36 million budget (not to mention the production costs). It is, if spent over a relatively short period of time, a significant campaign...despite the statistics of 12 cents per American. That is not, as I see it, the issue here.

When did BP's market research show that Americans will change gasoline purchase behavior in response to a clean and attractive environment? What percentage of those using each location actually do more than stand next to the car and pump the gas?

If BP wants to do something radical, than a repositioning of image is indeed a possible approach. The public perception of oil companies is the lowest amongst all sectors of the economy. Without exception, these companies are seen as greedy, rapacious, and irresponsible.

BP: if you want to reach the hearts and minds of the population, then do something tangible and important to connect with those hearts and minds. Clean restrooms are nice, but not really all that earth shaking.

**BrainTrust Profile** [Don Delzell, Principal, Retail Advantage](#)

Gasoline is a mature, commoditized product! However, my experience in the industry suggests that consumers will chose a particular gas station based not only on price, but on convenience and value-added services. This is why gas stations have been incorporating car washes, stand-alone vacuum and C-stores into their mix.

The younger non-Boomer generations are environmentally aware and do not have a problem with paying a bit more or voting with their feet (and wallets). I think that BP recognizes this and are positioning their company for this future customer base.

Instead of giving out coupons or discounting gasoline to attract customers they are focusing on adding value. This is a far better strategy IMHO.

**Bhupesh Shah, President, ethnicomm inc.**

Wouldn't it be nice if everyone looked upon this effort as a first step in getting back to "service stations"? You know--that is what they used to be called. Consumers received service when they bought gas. I know most will not believe it but you never pumped your own gas, washed your own windshield or checked your own oil.

I know this is not BP's intent. However, as our population ages the demand for service will increase. In most cases, the automobile is the second largest expenditure most people make. The care and feeding of this beast will become more complex. The number of dealers available to service gasoline, hydrogen, ethanol, diesel, etc. is declining. As retiring populations move away from large metro areas, the need for "service stations" will increase. I wish BP as much success as possible in this effort in hopes that it will result further expansion of service for consumers.

**Ed Dennis, president, Dennis Enterprises**

The biggest challenge that convenience store retailers have is getting the consumer to come into the store. Of course they won't pull into the lot unless the gas is priced well, but once they're there, I want to say it's about 10% that walk through those doors. A campaign like this is an attempt to overcome the obstacles that are keeping the consumer from coming into the store. For this campaign to be successful, BP will have to take steps to make sure that their stores really are a better experience than their competitors.

**'a65bug'**

Okay. I was completely on board with the concept until I reread the post for details about the execution and then went to the site.

On an intellectual level--based on the success of the Rugrats and Stewie from the Family Guy--I understand the appeal of the characters to at least the young end of the target demo.

But do I make it my business to stop at a BP for the enhanced customer experience based on the experiences of these cartoon characters? Especially when the gas there is maybe ten cents more a gallon than the Phillips 66 that's roughly the same distance from the house?

Fact is, our local BP is right on our way home from most places, and that Phillips 66 is a bit out of our way. And I've had repairs done there, so I know the folks and would love to give them the business. I'll stop if the price difference is a penny or two--but not a dime or more, as it often is.

So a customer-experience campaign is only going to build traffic if it can justify the higher price point--or take the focus off gasoline entirely and put it on GM and grocery. Of course, to do that is going to take some work at the location level, because I'm not sure the company can deliver that promise company wide.

And, is an online experience full of cartoon babies going to convey that better-experience message powerfully enough to justify an extra two-plus dollars a tank in the minds of the audience?

So. Strategy: B-plus.

Concept: C--I'll give the agency the benefit of the doubt with respect to the young end of the market.

Execution: B-plus. If cartoon babies reach the demo and justify the price point at the pump, this execution strikes me as fresh and current.

[BrainTrust Profile](#) [Mary Baum, Chairman, Mary Baum Creative Services](#)

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