

A PUKKA PROBLEM

DIAGEO

PIMM'S®

SUMMARY

For ten years she had resented having to order wine with Indian food - just because she didn't drink beer...

This is the story of one planner's personal thirst, and self-imposed mission, to persuade Diageo that there was a gap in the market for an alternative to the British practice of drinking lager with curry - and how one of their products was perfectly poised to fill it.

THIS IS THE STORY OF HOW PIMM'S BECAME 'PUKKA'.

It tells how years of trying to get a meeting with the brand team, and months pulling together research in stolen time, finally culminated in a single strategic presentation that demonstrated why Pimm's - the classically British, highly-seasonal, alcoholic drink favoured at weddings and Wimbledon, was the perfect accompaniment for that most British cuisine - curry. It outlines the argument that led Diageo to invest in a whole new usage occasion that could reduce Pimm's dependency on the unreliable British Summer and change the shape of its business forever.

Ultimately, it's about planning at its most entrepreneurial, where a strategy created the impetus to solve a problem for which no one had expected, or even asked for, an answer.

A PUKKA PROBLEM

I had spent two years trying to get this meeting and ten years thinking about it. Here I was, at last, in the foyer of the Diageo building, cold-calling someone else's client about a brand I didn't work on. And why? For the frankly nut-job reason that I just had to get this idea off my chest.

Most Brits know Pimm's as a lovely gin-based spirit that is ritualistically mixed with lemonade, fruit, cucumber and mint to celebrate the arrival of that most precious thing: the Great British Summer. From May to September the cry of "It's Pimm's O'clock" heralds the arrival of even the weakest sunshine thanks to a 1990s advertising campaign that passed into popular culture. Pimm's *means* summer in the British psyche and the strength of this association makes it a brand most would envy.

Yet here I was in the Diageo lobby, about to tell the Pimm's brand team that it wasn't enough.



PIMM'S: HOSTAGE TO BRITISH SUMMER TIME

When 80% of your sales are bound up in the summer months it can be very bad for business. Pimm's strength is ironically its greatest weakness: it is hostage to the weatherman.



This sunshine-dependency has historically seen Diageo seek to "weather-proof" the business with variants. Yet, none has given the brand sustainable business growth beyond its five month straitjacket.

More importantly, why go to the expense of developing new products when the original Pimm's No.1 Cup, is already... perfection? Instead of launching new propositions why not give the British public a reason to enjoy a drink they already know

and love *more often*, by looking towards a new usage occasion outside of summer?

This is exactly what I wanted to propose they do.

NO.1 CUP AND CURRY

As a non-beer drinker, my alcohol choice in an Indian restaurant is essentially “red or white?” Now, I like wine as much as the next person - but not with Indian food - and the planner in me hates seeing a gap in the market. Lager lovers get the chilled refreshment that *Cobra*, *Tiger*, *Kingfisher* bring to spicy food. So where was my default brand in this market? Why should I be denied a long, refreshing, alcoholic drink that could actually compliment and quell the fire of my Bhuna - *just because I don't drink beer?*

Although it would make for a better story, there was no revelatory moment when I realised the combination worked. It's simply something I know, and while I could wax lyrical about the balance of sugars and spices that make Pimm's so palate cleansing, the truth is ultimately in the tasting. It works.

HOMEMADE RESEARCH: PROVING IT “WASN'T JUST ME”

As with any personal quest, I did it in my spare time. I used my agency's resources to summon up as much qualitative and quantitative research as I could find outside my day-job. There was one imperative. I had to demonstrate why this idea was bigger than me. A nugget of data sang out: 35% of British drinkers don't drink beer. More than a third of British boozers, 14.5million people don't drink beer - but the data also showed they do eat curry. I wasn't alone.

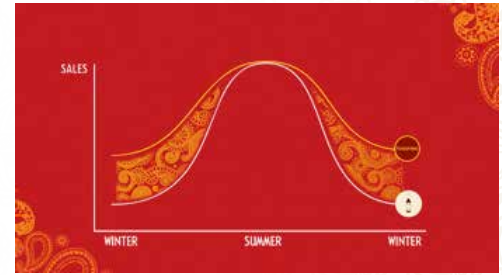
A filmed interview with the head bartender from high-end Indian restaurant Dishoom (where “Bombay Pimm's” happened to be their most popular cocktail) explained the science: high tannin content in wine made it unpalatable with Indian food because the tannins “excite the spice in your mouth,” he explained, “making a hot curry feel hotter”.

A lunchtime research group of beer-rejecters didn't know about tannins, but they did know that they usually drank wine with curry “even though they didn't really like it”. Cider bloated them and spirits were “too strong with a meal”.

A home-edited film of these beer-rejecters eating an Indian takeaway showed a suboptimal set they of choices they hadn't questioned, and concluded by revealing their reactions when offered Pimm's with their curry. Murmurs of approval quickly turned to outright conversion.

THERE MIGHT BE SOMETHING IN THIS: THE DIAGEO REACTION

The client team had never before seen the opportunity laid out before them. This strategy, they enthused, could exploit a whole new market to help change the shape of the Pimm's business by reducing its dependence on good weather and flattening the sales curve. It could make it "Pimm's O'clock" all year round.



That meeting with Pimm's took place in August. After a month of total silence, then a trickle of emails, on 9th October, I stood at my 30th birthday party overwhelmed by the news. The clients wanted to give us a trial investment of £30,000 to "test & learn" and see if this was something they should invest in further.

ONE MONTH TO PROVE OUR CASE

So, we had some money; we had the will to do something special, but to meet the client's expectations we needed to activate before year-end. We had one month and there were client provisos.

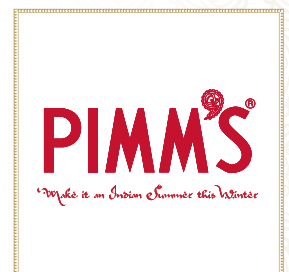
First, the "perfect serve" - the summer ritual of mixing Pimm's in pitchers - would need to be protected. To separate this activity and to focus on the taste alone the humble pre-mixed "picnic can" was about to have its moment.

Secondly, the Anglo-Indian relationship, stretching back to the Raj and Empire was both creatively inspirational and dangerous. No one wants to be an Imperialist in this day and age. Pimm's with curry felt like a natural quirk of modern Britain, but balance was key.

ENTER 'TEAM BOMBAY'

I begged, stole and borrowed a small team to help me: creative, account management, social and PR.

We quickly got to our call to action: "Make it an Indian Summer this Winter, with Pimm's"; the strategy even gave birth to a new version of the sacred logo by adding a "bindified" version of the all-important apostrophe.



The goal was to get people sampling Pimm's with curry. By luck, our social manager happened to know someone with a venue on London's infamous curry capital, Brick Lane. He could do us a deal. Friends and colleagues would help staff a pop-up diner where we could hand out Pimm's with spicy Indian delicacies to passers-by.

A serendipitous encounter in my local pub brought in the missing ingredient to elevate the PR.

Hardeep Singh Kohli - Anglo-Indian chef, comedian and broadcaster - became much more than just “celebrity ambassador” - he was all-round brand consultant. Hardeep got us last-minute access to sample Pimm’s with Indian restaurateurs at the British Curry Awards, to prove trade appetite for the idea. It was even Hardeep who came up with the name of our pop-up – Pukka Pimm’s.



UNINTENDED INFLUENCE

We estimate 500 consumers came through the doors of Pukka Pimm's between December 4-6th 2014.

Of the 186 we surveyed, 84% said they enjoyed the combination of Pimm's and curry, and 78% would both try it again and recommend it to a friend.

Consumer appetite for the idea was realised. I definitely wasn't alone!



40 journalists and food bloggers attended our invite-only dinner and subsequently wrote about the surprisingly good combination of flavours. Just before Christmas, at the busiest time in the PR calendar, with less than a month's notice, we managed to pull a rabbit from a hat. A full-page Metro article sealed our proof of media appetite for the idea. And there was one more important audience we hadn't explicitly figured into our hastily-formed plans: Diageo internal stakeholders.

So what is next for Pukka Pimm's? Stock has been assigned for further commercial trials and expectations are high within Diageo for the future of this new pairing. All of this, set in motion by one solitary strategic presentation, one August day.



Secondly, perhaps there's a lesson for agencies. We often talk about honest client relationships being a condition for great work - yet we run "new business" like a Victorian dating agency. We rely on lengthy marriage proposals and dowries, rather than starting with magic and love.