



2007 Silver Effie Winner

“Schell’s Dark. A Beer Facing Extinction”

Category: **David vs. Goliath**

Agency: **Colle+McVoy**

Client: **August Schell Brewing Co.**

Strategic Challenge

At 145 years old, the August Schell Brewing Company in New Ulm, Minnesota, is the country’s second- oldest family owned and operated brewery. Since its beginning, the brewery has been home to a deer farm, leading to the beer’s nickname among old-timers as “deer beer.” But their storied history had done little to help them crack the largest potential market in their own backyard: the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Schell’s had perfected an array of seasonal beer flavors, but they couldn’t out-spend or out-yell the big money, domestic “macro-brews” – such as Miller, Budweiser and Coors – to obtain vital tap lines at bars. Claiming a new tap line meant bars had to kick out a big player backed by million-dollar marketing campaigns—no easy feat. Instead, Schell’s was stuck nursing a tired perception as “your father’s beer.” And with only a handful of distribution points, they were facing the possibility of extinction from the Twin Cities.

The big challenge: How can Schell’s establish a larger presence in a crowded Twin Cities marketplace and stake its rightful claim as an iconic local beer? More important, how can they make an impact with a measly \$120,000?

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Objectives

Distribution

- Increase on-premise bar penetration by increasing Schell's Dark tap lines in the Twin Cities by 60%.

Sales

- Increase overall Schell's Dark sales in the Twin Cities region by 17%.

Brand-building

- Breathe new life into a tired, old brand and establish brand loyalty with a new influential group.

The Big Idea

Schell's came to us looking for "some ads" for their entire lineup of specialty beers. But a very limited budget led us to look beyond traditional advertising to obtain tap lines and build buzz.

Identify the Influentials

Knowing we had limited funds, we narrowed our efforts to a single group. Through intense focus group research, we homed in on the young, urban cultural elite who held sway in the Twin Cities' oldest bars. Dubbed the "Independent Influentials," this group of late-twenty-somethings favors Pabst Blue Ribbon and Miller High Life for their genuine, yet unobtrusive feel.

Unite Schell's Under a Single Beer Flag

We knew we'd never make up any ground with the Independent Influentials by throwing the whole line of Schell's beer at them. So we singled out and championed a nearly forgotten flavor as their flagship tap line beer: Schell's Dark. Unlike other dark ales that taste heavy (poor bedfellows for the young nighttime crowd), Schell's Dark tastes light, making it extremely drinkable. It was the perfect complement for bars to round out their tap-line taste profiles.

Get Taps Flowing With Music

By becoming indie concert promoters, we created highly exclusive, must-see events using nationally known, up-and-coming bands. These events became the linchpin in gaining new distribution in key bars. We would drive crowds to the bars each week for tickets to exclusive concerts and, in turn, the bars would give us exclusive tap lines.

Resurrect the Mighty Stag

Dusting off the old brand revealed the Schell's deer—an authentic icon steeped in the brand's history. While the old bottles and marketing downplayed this horned animal, the new brand would embrace this powerful icon and make it more meaningful—albeit more amusing—for a younger generation.

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Bringing the Idea to Life

Return of the Great Dark Buck

Schell's Dark has great taste, but the packaging itself needed to more prominently feature the deer icon in order to evoke the brand's true heritage. Looking to play up the light taste of its "drinkable dark" profile, we moved the beer into a clear bottle and replaced the dark, monotone packaging with a backdrop of lighter retro hues. This new brand identity united the campaign under a single deer icon and created a memorable look that carried over to all communications. What's more, we gave the deer a voice with a funny view on subjects ranging from mating season to hunting season.

Must-See Concerts Equal Must-Have Tap Lines

Leveraging the humble, family-owned roots, we secured highly respected, indie rock favorites to play free, must-see shows (e.g., Spoon, Brian Jonestown Massacre). To build the buzz, we identified the top 20 "Alpha" bars (THE Twin Cities bars that served as ground zero for the Independent Influentials – the places where trends in music, fashion and beer start). We persuaded the top 20 bars to host ticket-giveaway nights in the two months leading up to these epic concerts, and promised hundreds of music-crazed fans would crowd their bars in return for agreeing to add a Schell's Dark tap line and sell it on special during a giveaway night.

Spread the Scent With Schell's Dark "Buck Nights"

For the final two months of 2005, weekly bar events promoted ticket giveaways to an exclusive, free concert featuring indie rock favorite, Spoon. More than 200 local record and clothing stores and coffee shops were plastered with branded concert posters (many of which eventually sold on eBay). Giveaway experiences were reinforced through coasters that told the deer beer's history, wall hangings and antler-shaped tap handles.

Share the Dirt With a Freshly Grown *Onion* (Twin Cities Edition)

In lieu of more traditional advertising, we connected with the new Twin Cities office of *The Onion* and granted them exclusive promotional rights for the show. The partnership helped cut advertising costs while reinforcing the pub's credibility with its hipster readership.

Make Schell's Drinkers Human Billboards

We developed deer-centric beer T-shirts and gave them away at promotion nights to select Alpha bar-goers and in thrift shops a few weeks before the actual giveaways. The T-shirts' authentic look created a bridge for the new branding and sparked interest and demand from a group of beer drinkers who are normally turned off by marketing.

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Results

Aside from creating frenzy amongst thousands of hipster concert-goers who were introduced to the new (old) Schell's, the beer's new branding reinvigorated the Schell's name. The brand is now back from near extinction and moving out of the woods. Schell's Dark is thriving with record sales and new tap lines that are supplanting the macro-brews in the Twin Cities.

Sales

- Overall brewery sales were up 30% in 2006, with year-over-year monthly increases for 13 months since the campaign launch.
- Twin Cities tap line penetration increased by 500%, exceeding year-over-year projections more than eightfold.

Press/Buzz

- Hundreds of blogs covered the concert events and hyped the apparel and posters.
- The *Twin Cities Business Journal* profiled the resurrection of the Schell's Dark brand.
- The Spoon concert was listed by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* as its "concert of the week" and linked the concert to the Schell's brand.
- The August Schell Brewing Company local gift shop can't keep the T-shirts in stock.

Budget: Under \$500 thousand

Campaign Reach: Local

Media Channels: Newspaper, P-O-P, OOH, PR

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