



**Get Smart**

# Restaging a Stale Brand

## MARKETING CHALLENGE: POSITIONING

### Case Study

#### BACKGROUND

Hush Puppies® was founded in 1958 at a time when an uncomfortable dress shoe was the norm. Most commercial historians credit the brand for inventing the non-sneaker casual shoe.



**Hush Puppies®**

Over time, the star faded but experienced a short-lived resurgence in the mid-1990's as "club kids," fashion designers, and celebrities were attracted to its retro vibe. The brand did not capitalize on the renewed popularity, and by the mid-2000's the *Mall Walker* was its most popular product. Ironically, outside the U.S., the brand had a premium, Americana persona.

#### BUSINESS PROBLEMS

- The complexity of managing the brand globally with different personalities
- Management concern that distributors and retailers outside the U.S. would abandon the brand as its domestic perception deteriorated
- Declining gross margins as the U.S. customer base aged and shifted to inexpensive product in the portfolio

#### RESULTS

- Research validated that older consumers purchased specific products and not the brand. As such, the *Mall Walker* and similar products were shifted to a sub-brand.
- The main brand was repositioned around equities important to a younger consumer.
- By 2017, the sub-brand and legacy products were phased out with a managed impact on overall sales.
- Gross margin for the revitalized product line substantially improved.

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### THE ASSIGNMENT

- Identify the risk of shifting inexpensive product to a sub-brand or dropping it altogether.
- Identify and validate all brand equities among those aged 45 and under.
- More precisely define a future target consumer.
- Develop preliminary positioning concepts that were relevant to this younger consumer.
- Draft and test positioning concepts with the new target consumer.

### METHODS

- Internal stakeholder interviews to identify brand equities and to roll up team ideas
- Qualitative and quantitative research among older consumers to assess risk of creating a sub-brand
- A qualitative and quantitative study among younger consumers to identify and validate brand equities
- Creative positioning competition among local art students
- Internal workshop to develop preliminary positioning concepts
- A study to validate future positioning
- A workshop to finalize positioning statements and to align the marketing and design teams on the future direction



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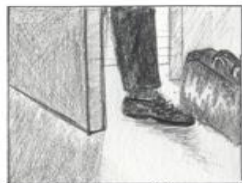
### Case Study

#### WHAT MADE THIS PROJECT SUCCESSFUL?

The research among older consumers was instrumental in building a business case for the sub-brand. During the internal interviews, we noticed that the team was short on ideas and inspiration for moving the brand forward. During the younger-consumer research, several ideas emerged that were great repositioning starting points; however, the client team was unable to latch onto these initial ideas.

As such, we asked four local art students (all under the age of 30) to take these ideas and build a personally-relevant campaign. With a minimal amount of extra time and money, these campaigns added the needed inspiration to the consumer research and served as an important catalyst for the positioning workshop.

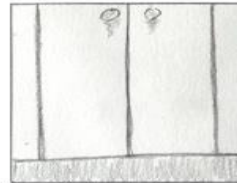
*“Comfort  
Food For  
Your Feet”*



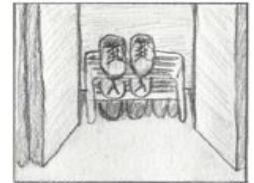
Front door opens. We see a man in business attire walk in and drop his briefcase with a groan, then keep walking.



He takes his shoes off with a sigh, and we hear more groaning/grumbling as we see him keep walking for a second before...



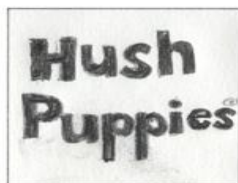
Cut to the front of a closet door. We see it open.



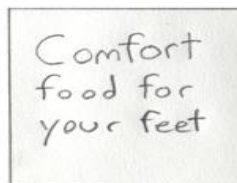
Inside there is a shoe rack, which the camera sits on for a second while we hear "hmmm..." and possibly the sound of lips smacking. Finally, we see the man choose a pair of Hush Puppies.



The man then puts on the shoes, and when he does, we hear "Ahhhh"s and "Mmmm"s, as we see his feet wiggle around happily.



"Ahhh"s and "Mmmm"s continue over these last two panels







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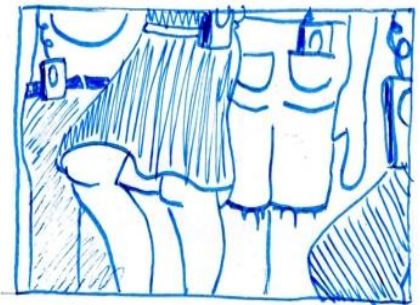
### Case Study



*youth at a silent disco*



*slow, steady pan down as they dance, revealing mp3 players*



*continue pan, slowly*



*everyone is wearing Mall Walkers.*

HUSH  
PUPPIES  
CUT  
THROUGH  
THE  
NOISE.

*maybe this text overlaid the preceding shot?*





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### Case Study

This assignment, and especially the concept “keep your feet happy,” led to the brand platform evident today. Since this assignment, sales of Hush Puppies have grown above industry averages, and the brand has solidified its stance as one of the most desirable footwear brands outside of the U.S.

## We Invented Casual

*SO WE COULD ALL WALK HAPPY*

Since 1958, Hush Puppies has led the casual lifestyle revolution. The first of its kind, our soft, relaxed footwear invited people to kick back and enjoy a comfortable, casual way of life.

Since then, we have become a household name and a cultural icon in 165 countries around the world. And we continue to define casual with a fun spirit and our beloved basset hound.



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- We highly recommend the book ***Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind***. It’s a marketing classic, an easy read, and worth the time.
- Does your organization need a responsive helping hand when conducting do-it-yourself research? Our consultants are available to assist with problem definition, project scoping, reviewing discussion guides, reviewing questionnaires, interview coaching, and more. This is the best way to offer your team the training and support they need to elevate customer understanding across the organization. Blocks of time can be booked according to your needs. [Contact us](#) for more details.



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- [Check out our event schedule](#) for upcoming workshops.



**Kickstart**

You can quickly activate the positioning process with a workshop focused on your own brand and products. It is an excellent way to enhance skills, roll up internal ideas, and identify gaps in your knowledge. [Contact us for more details.](#)