

# “Got Window Film?”

Decades into its battle for consumer awareness, experts explain what it would take to make window film a household name.

by Drew Vass

According to data released by the International Window Film Association (IWFA) and stemming from a national Harris Poll survey, as of February 2014, around half of adult Americans were familiar with the solar control benefits of window film. Fewer (27 percent) know about films for impact-resistance. And some of the manufacturer representatives interviewed for this article indicate that they feel even those numbers may be optimistic. This begs the question: How, decades into its existence, could window film remain an obscure item and what would it take to make these products a “household name?”

According to marketing experts and based on the figures associated with major consumer awareness campaigns, the shortest answer is: Tens of millions of dollars. That’s the cost for a nationwide, prime-time campaign the likes of “got milk?”, “the touch, the feel of cotton” or “Beef, it’s what’s for dinner.” At the same time, those experts agree that it is unlikely that any one manufacturer would go to bat with such a campaign, nor would it produce the best results either for one brand or the industry on whole. Instead, they suggest that the most effective consumer awareness campaigns stem from industry-wide collaborations. WINDOW FILM magazine’s research indicates that no such collaboration has existed among window film manufacturers to date. Furthermore, conversations with

manufacturers (or in many cases a lack thereof) cast a shadow of doubt over this scenario.

## Step One: Come Together

### (Spoiler Alert: This is Not Optional)

“Companies have to be sat down together and the collective benefits have to be communicated clearly and convincingly,” says Lisa Perry, a global marketing and brand strategist who’s managed and directed campaigns for companies like Activision, Coca-Cola Company, ConAgra Foods and Walt Disney Company. “If they have PR firms, or employees, those people need to be at the table so they can establish a plan, collectively. Everyone involved has to commit a portion of their businesses to doing this on an annual basis.”

In 1993, it was slumping milk sales that brought California’s largest milk producers to the same table, agreeing to allocate three cents per gallon of milk sold to a general consumer awareness campaign. As a result, the California

Milk Processor Board (CMBP) was born, along with a \$23 million annual budget—a fine sum for the San Francisco-based ad agency CMBP hired to design and execute its now famous campaign: “got milk?”

While CMBP’s campaign proves a valuable point about collective efforts (Who’d have thought that three cents per gallon would lead to \$23 million?), additional and less costly examples exist, many of which relate more directly to the window film industry.

The cellulose insulation industry has its “Naturally better insulation” campaign. Hybrid and electric



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—Lisa Perry, global marketing and brand strategist

Window film.

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automobiles are backed by “Accelerate the good.” And the vinyl siding industry boldly leans on “America sides with vinyl.” But, like “got milk?” all of these campaigns coalesce around more than slogans and common purse strings; the real common denominator is: industry-wide buy-in.

“If you have five ‘yes’s’ in a room and two ‘no’s,’ then it’s hard to proceed on something,” says Jeffrey Plummer, Madico’s senior vice president of sales and marketing, adding that, to his knowledge, precious few attempts have been made at collaborations. “You almost have to have unanimous support when trying to get an industry to collaborate.”

Marketing experts and representatives for associations with experience in industry-wide campaigns

The Window Film Association of Australia and New Zealand promises “Energy Efficiency Never Looked Better.”

Why? To undo perceptions of poor quality.

say that almost won’t cut it—unanimous buy-in is a required feature for successful consumer awareness efforts. And we’re told by those same individuals that, based on their experiences, several factors can get in the way of uniformity: age (beyond an industry’s startup, companies tend to overlook the need for collaborating); complacency (when everyone’s content with their cur-

rent slice of the pie, they tend to sit at separate tables); and the presence of big players (like window film’s few multi-billion-dollar parent companies and suppliers).

“Interestingly enough, several large players actually hindered industry-wide efforts,” says Dan Lea, executive director for Cellulose Insulation Manufacturers Association (CIMA), who adds that you might expect multi-billion dollar companies to support the need for

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awareness efforts. "Their general attitude was that they were large enough to do whatever marketing they deemed necessary and, by conducting these efforts through an association, they [would] just [be] helping out their smaller competitors."

Lea says it was the threat of outside competition—when manufacturers of fiberglass insulation mounted a negative campaign against cellulose—that brought his industry (including its large players) to the same sandbox. Amid smear efforts and an energy crisis in the 1970s, CIMA was born with an advertising budget in tow funded by membership dues. At one point, Lea says CIMA's members even voted to increase their dues in order to fund additional efforts.

## Step Two: Establish the Industry's Promise

Marketing experts and industry associations are quick to point out that there's more to industry campaigns than catchy phrases. Messaging has to be centered on an industry-wide "brand" promise for consumers, which must be placed as broadly and consistently as possible.

"Just like the 'Incredible edible egg' and 'got milk?' campaigns, you have to have well defined, turn-key messages in place, that the entire industry coalesces around and uses consistently," says Ann Sung Ruckstuhl, a 15-year veteran with executive experience in global consumer awareness campaigns for companies ranging from Symantec and eBay, to Hewlett-Packard. "I believe in rolling thunder, but you have to sit down to develop and agree—as an industry—on a compelling story, before you attempt to create that effect."

Ruckstuhl and other experts agree that campaigns need not appeal to every potential buyer in one fell swoop by covering every feature and benefit; instead, they

need to initially center on any "wow factor" that's powerful enough to compel adopters into sharing their experiences. Whether it's adding wow to the look of their automobiles, or "wows" that come from opening lower energy bills, they say the initial job of a consumer awareness campaign is to place the words "window film" into the mouths of as many consumers as possible, then to deliver on its promise.

Of course, no rule states that awareness slogans can't carry double entendre. The Window Film Association of Australia and New Zealand promises "Energy Efficiency Never Looked Better," which the association's marketing manager says seeks to undo what has long been enemy number one: perceptions of poor quality. Another goal is making people aware of film's energy saving benefits. Brian Wynne, president of Electric Drive Transportation Association (EDTA) says that, while sales among hybrid and electric vehicles tend to spike amid higher fuel prices, EDTA leans on more than efficiency for the wow factor in its "Accelerate the good" campaign. The slogan speaks both to increasing momentum for environment-friendly products and to another experience that Wynne says consumers latch onto: Zippiness.

Ruckstuhl says that creating "rolling thunder" sometimes involves various phases, each with new messages that build upon the last. "Got milk?" for instance, fell on the heels of "Milk Does a Body Good," which campaign organizers say led to a 90-plus percent awareness level for the benefits of milk, while, at the same time, it failed to increase consumption. It wasn't until celebrities donned milk mustaches (amid "got milk?") that drinking milk became both the healthy *and* "cool" thing to do.

## Step Three: Separation of Church and State

None of the window film manufacturers interviewed for this article conduct nationwide consumer-facing awareness campaigns. And at least one manufacturer offers up an explanation as to why this may be the case: While some manufacturers and suppliers of raw materials represent multi-billion dollar companies, window film supports a relatively small portion of their overall businesses—pennies per square-foot in some cases, we're told. And while this manufacturer's representative (who prefers to remain unnamed) suggests that those numbers improve at the manufacturer (coating and laminating) level to possibly a dollar per square foot, the bulk of profits—and possibly therefor the bulk of the benefits for consumer awareness—lies with dealers who can turn \$20 worth of window film into \$200 worth of sales.

Possibly for this reason, manufacturers lean on the end of the supply chain for consumer-facing marketing efforts by providing dealers with turnkey elements, including everything from signage or web- and print-based advertising, to point of sale materials. And while marketing experts say they agree with this approach, those same experts clarify that an industry cannot rely on its dealers to produce all of its consumer-facing advertising and expect to make significant inroads into consumer awareness. Instead, they suggest that brand-neutral consumer awareness advertising must be driven at the industry level and precede dealers' use of individually branded materials, which ideally are reserved for moments closer to the point of sale.

"You have to think about how you can do your part in driving the industry collectively," Perry says. "Industries do this all of the time. First you promote the product type, through an awareness cam-

paign. That has to come first. Then and only then, you establish how your particular brand is different and compelling—how it uniquely adds value beyond that industry promise. Brand becomes a factor when it comes to consumers who are aware, but need to select a specific product.”

All four of the industry associations interviewed for this article report that they have complete buy-in for Perry’s suggestion.

“Our member companies know that wearing their ‘industry hats’ and working collectively to promote the category is more efficient than working individually to educate homeowners on the benefits of vinyl,” says Jeff Smith, senior manager of communications for Vinyl Siding Institute. “This frees them to focus on promoting their own brands and products.”

## Step Four: Rules for Deployment

Of course, manufacturers and dealers of window film products aren’t going to showcase consumer awareness efforts over their own brands without some promise of results. This is where marketers say creativity often comes into play.

Lea says that along with the cellulose insulation industry’s independent testing standards came a certification label that manufacturers add to their marketing materials and product packaging. Marketing experts suggest that there’s an opportunity for buy-in here for consumer awareness campaigns, because once an industry trains consumers to look for a certification label (through awareness efforts), no manufacturer is likely to be caught dead without it; at the same time, campaign administrators can require set guidelines for use and placement. Ruckstahl adds that this system also can include incentives.

“Typically, associations have what’s called a market development



Austin and Lauren Caple of Top Notch Window Tinting in Newfield, N.J. have borrowed a page from got milk?’s playbook with their matching shirts.

fund, or MDF, which helps to offset the costs for advertising, while requiring the inclusion of some elements,” she says.

Of course, marketing experts point out that not all of those advertising efforts have to center on expensive prime time spots in order to be effective. For instance, those experts, as well as representatives for associations, all suggest that today’s campaigns should capitalize on free social media. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages should be established (among others). Such companies should solicit input from everyone ranging from industry members to general consumers, where they’re encouraged to share just about anything related to window film. At the same time, all agree that an ideal situation calls for consumers taking to their own social spaces in order to voluntarily share experiences. This is where consumers can set wildfire to awareness efforts.

Case in point: Kent Davis, global marketing communications manager for Solar Gard says that his company fronts a social media effort that’s fairly diverse, mixing general topics about home energy with occasional information about window film, which he says has netted more than

100,000 followers via Facebook.

“If we, as a consortium of manufacturers and dealers, were to utilize this sort of consumer facing strategy ... public awareness about window film will grow, helping the industry as a whole,” Davis adds.

## Step Five: Repeat Steps One Through Four (Again and Again)

Branding experts suggest that the road to consumer awareness is one with no end destination. Just as the milk industry first moved to create awareness for nutritional values, then on to making milk hip, once a campaign reaches maximum velocity among an initial audience, awareness efforts only shift to other demographics.

The message changes, but the prescription for consumer awareness stays the same: Industry wide collaboration, structure and consistency do more than make products household names, they build and maintain conversations that lead to bigger slices for everyone involved. Or, as Ruckstahl might refer to it: “Rolling Thunder 2.0” (and beyond). **WF**

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