

# The play's the thing

**People love to play games, and, as Shell's Make Money promotion shows, they'll flock to the point of sale to take part. By George Pitcher**

It is appropriate that the American term for promotions like the much vaunted and widely imitated Shell Make Money campaign, aimed specifically at getting customers to the point of sale, should be 'traffic building'. The amount of extra traffic built at Shell stations at the expense of its less imaginative rivals has, most observers believe, made the £2m investment in the promotion look like money well spent.

Such can be the power of the game card. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that this technique of sales promotion has been around for some time — Shell first used it in the 60s. And while there is good reason to continue to exploit a proven business formula, other techniques and variations on the theme have emerged which merit attention.

Some of these have been successfully used by Peter Cotterell, who has been selling sales promotions for 14 years, for the past two of them through his own company, Unibrand. Cotterell brought invisible ink, developed as a potent sales promotion weapon in the US, to Britain some seven years ago. Off the back of invisible ink gimmickry, he has developed some home grown sales promotion techniques which have effectively reversed the Gulf Stream of sales innovation — for the US is now adopting his ideas.

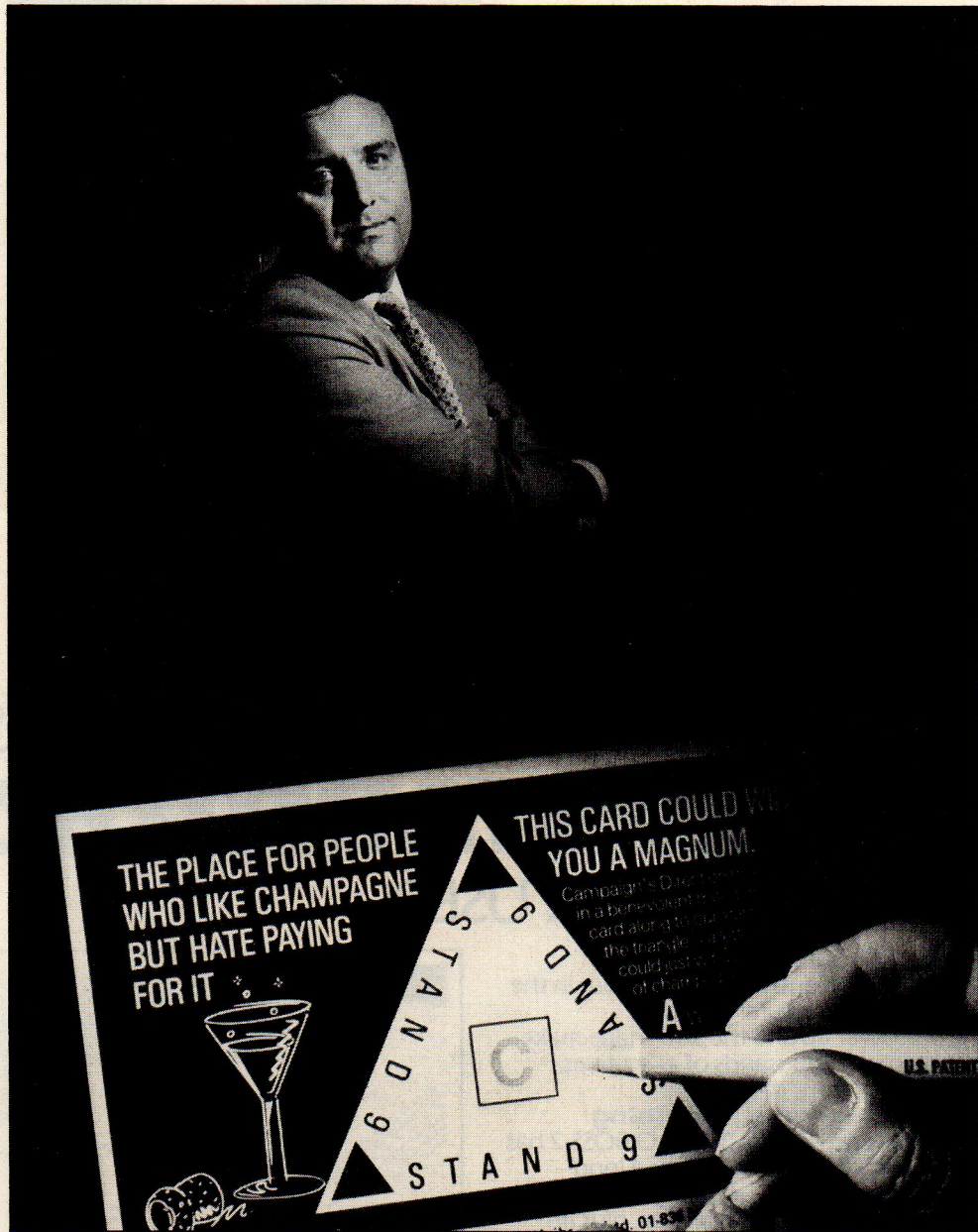
## Complement ads

The Cotterell philosophy for sales promotion is a straightforward but pertinent one: 'I tell retailers that they spend lots on getting their shops, their products and their staff right, and then spend lots on advertising. But then they don't spend any money on getting the customers into the shop. Awareness must be converted into sales, so the ads must be made more cost effective with sales promotions. I'm not against above the line, but below the line can certainly be more than complementary.'

The invisible ink technique broadly consists of the target receiving a card on which a 'lucky number' or other message is printed in invisible ink. The visible part of the message enjoins the consumer to take the card for 'decoding' with a special pen. No prizes for guessing where this pen is held — at point of sale.

'Where we differ from scratch cards is that the punter *has* to come to the pen at point of sale to know whether he's a prize winner or not,' says Cotterell. 'Scratch cards are certainly good at generating excitement in-store, but invisible ink cards actually get them into the store in the first place.'

Clients, of course, are often reluctant to release details of any sort of successful card campaign (unless it is as high profile as Shell's)



**Cotterell:** 'I tell retailers they don't spend any money on getting customers into the shop'

for fear that the competition might latch on. Nevertheless, Cotterell can cite examples of invisible ink's triumphs.

At a recent NEC exhibition, for instance, there was the usual coach shuttle service for visitors from the arrival points. Unibrand, on behalf of an industrial exhibitor, gave out around 12,000 cards to the captive audience in the coaches — cards to be decoded for prizes at the client's stand. During the 405 minutes of the exhibition, 5,000 cards were returned to the stand.

'The only complaint was that it was *too* successful — they needed more staff to cope,' says Cotterell. 'They not only got all those people to the stand, but they got a very useful mailing list out of it as well.'

Another success story for invisible ink arises

out of a promotion for Hepworth in 1982. 'Smartly dressed men between the ages of 25 and 35' were given invisible ink cards in the streets. These offered discounts on Hepworth clothes, plus the possibility of winning a week-end for two in Paris. There was a 30% redemption and, according to Cotterell, every redemption led to extra business.

A more surprising application of Cotterell's invisible ink cards was a promotion for builder Westbury Homes. Cards delivered to 750,000 homes offered the chance to win holidays worth a total of £25,000. Invisible numbers were decoded at the nearest Westbury show home.

There was a 1% redemption, and, of the 7,500 visitors, just over 100 bought a Westbury home as a direct result of the invisible ink invitation. That was within three months of the dis-

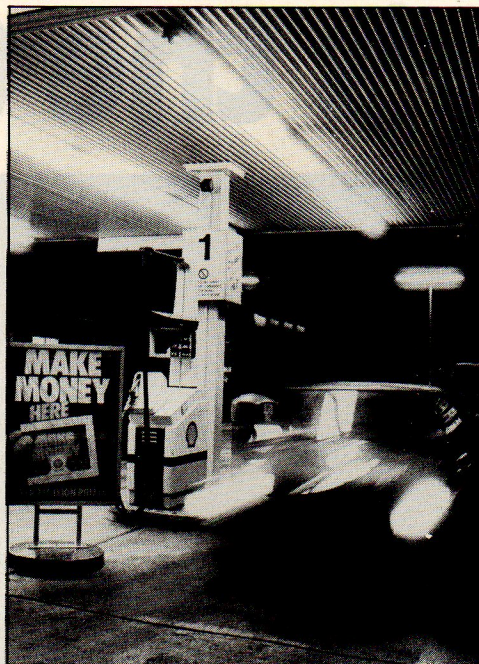


tribution, and Cotterell points out that there may be a further residual effect over the following two or three years, because more than half of those bringing in cards stopped long enough to have a look around the show house.

A similar sort of promotion was run for the Abbey National — so successfully, according to Cotterell, that the branch manager phoned in a panic for more staff on the second day of the promotion, which has since been repeated four times. A spin-off for Unibrand in this instance was that the wife of the marketing manager of the Mid-Wales Development Corporation received a card. The result: a 70,000-card mailing to major businesses, with the invisible ink decoder on the Ambassador Train, which travels the country selling the advantages of relocation in Wales.

Similar opportunities exist for travel agents (e.g. 'Don't book your holiday until you've taken this card to your local travel agent, because you may be able to have it free'). Even the petrol companies, despite their recent flurry of promotional activity, could use the technique.

Cotterell suggests that, for petrol, his invisible ink system could be used in reverse — the customer keeps a pen in the car and gets an invisible ink card on every visit to the garage. One card, rubbed with the special pen, will reveal a jackpot prize. Further, to make sure the motorist picks up a decoding pen in the first place,



**Make Money:** Old idea, new sophistication

cards could be mailed to a target audience, telling them that their pens await them at their local filling stations.

However, before any scheme offering high money prizes was accepted by the petrol com-

panies, they would have to be satisfied that the game could not be broken. With invisible inks that might be very difficult.

Unibrand has two new sales promotion developments. One is audio cards, used by electrical goods manufacturer Braun at the recent Incentive Marketing Show in Brighton. Cards are backed with a strip of audio tape pre-recorded with a message ('Congratulations, you've won a trip for two...') which can only be played back through a machine at an exhibition stand or at point of sale — a machine, incidentally, that cannot record, so that fraud is ruled out.

### In the home

Cotterell also argues that audio cards have great potential for getting the sales rep into the home. The card arrives first, the rep plus playback machine a day or two later. As a sales technique, Cotterell describes it as 'less a foot in the door, more a knee in the groin'.

His other new development is a tape cassette with a difference — one side is recorded backwards on specially modified machines. The recipient can thus play the tape on his own machine so that it reveals the possibility of a prize, but the prize message itself, on the other side of the tape, emerges on a normal machine as the garbled nonsense of reversed speech. Again, the machine that can reveal all is in the hands of the store manager or visiting rep,

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awaiting the visit of the potential customer.

The audio cards and the cassettes come rather more expensive than invisible ink cards, of course, but they are examples of the growing sophistication in sales bait. Innovation, however, is only part of the story. Shell's Make Money campaign, for instance, is an example of sticking to a basic idea that works, though the point must be made that there were a large number of sophisticated new developments.

The promotion, run by Don Marketing, gave the lie to the well-worn theory that the distress-purchase nature of petrol buying means that location and price are the critical sales factors.

### 'Panic measure'

'We proved that simply isn't true,' says Don Marketing's managing director, John Chambers. 'But the way some of the major companies dropped their prices as a result of the Shell promotion can only be described as a panic measure—an emotional reaction that could do no-one any good,' he says. 'The cost of a price cut is horrendous compared with that of a well-run promotion—maybe ten times as much. The more creative promotions mean that market share can fluctuate without resort to price cutting.'

That is a sound argument for sales promotions, and one that is gaining currency in other industries. Marketing Solutions, for instance, took on another traditionally price sensitive



Flanagan: Of the 'horses for courses' school

market with a sales promotion for Marlboro cigarettes. The campaign had nothing to do with knocking money off the product. Instead, it involved going to the trouble and expense of taking a life-size model of the famous Marlboro

grand prix car around pubs. There, members of the public were given a chance to try their driving skills with the car and a video simulator of the race track.

Marketing Solutions argues that a sales problem needs analysis before attempting a solution, which may take the form of anything from running seminars, restructuring the sales operation or giving away free tea towels. Game cards are only one possible solution.

Another member of the 'horses for courses' school of sales promotion is Fine Fare's Michael Flanagan. Different stores have different sales problems, he points out, so sales promotions must be individually tailored to get customers into each of them. He cites the example of a Fine Fare in Hayward's Heath, which competes with a very good Sainsbury store and an average Tesco. The target was fairly up-market, so the answer, Fine Fare decided, was to offer free bottles of Beaujolais Nouveau for purchases over a given sum, supported by local press ads and a leaflet drop. Elsewhere, the bait might equally be 1p off the price of beans.

So while the technological advances in games aimed at attracting the shopper to the point of sale may well be creating exciting new opportunities, it is worth remembering that, to be effective, they still need to be subject to the marketing disciplines that made sales promotion techniques successful in the first place. ☐

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