

Getting the treatment

Dave March learns how a UK design agency is helping a Japanese cosmetics company to strengthen its brand presence



Sunstar

The Division

David Tonge and Nicole Hodgkinson founded The Division in 2003 with the simple goal of combining their big agency experience with the craftsman's attention to detail. Based in the heart of London, they have an award winning design studio with a bi-lingual team of gifted designers and a network of trusted partners.

Tracing its history to 1932 when Kaneda Keitei Shokai founded a company manufacturing and selling rubber glue for bicycles, Japan-headquartered Sunstar provides high-value-added products and services in the areas of oral care, health and beauty, as well as the chemical and automobile industries.

Client

Agency

Company backgrounds:

London-based design agency The Division is somewhat unusual for a UK business in that it works extensively with Japanese companies. Its founder David Tonge is passionate about the country's culture and fluent in the language – attributes that have secured his agency many projects in Japan.

Since 2011 The Division has enjoyed a relationship with Japanese oral care and cosmetics company Sunstar. Over that period the agency has worked closely with Sunstar's marketing director around exploring innovation to support brand strategy.

Although Sunstar is a large company in the Japanese market, it is not of the huge scale of a P&G or a GSK. Therefore, it was felt that Sunstar should consider a way of differentiating its offering. One path that the company has taken is to focus on what it calls 'semi healthy' people; possibly there is something lost in translation from the Japanese, but the implication is a demographic incorporating people of middle-age upwards, perhaps those with pre-diabetes or experiencing age-related hormone changes.

The Division has been helping Sunstar to understand how it might effectively target this market through the design of physical devices that support its range of cosmetic and healthcare products.

Sunstar is fundamentally a chemical company – a manufacturer of toothpastes, shampoos, face creams and so forth – as such the company has no internal product development or hardware manufacturing capability. It was thus The Division's responsibility to consider particular device areas, typically mechanisms to dispense one of Sunstar's products.

"We looked at various devices," explains Tonge. "A humidifier, for example, that releases fumes while a person is asleep for the treatment of colds or sleep difficulties. We looked at body brushes using Sunstar solutions and a face cream applicator that vibrated as it applied product as part of a skincare regime."

Tonge explains that the project was essentially an exercise in exploring how best to sell product. One of Sunstar's key routes to market in Japan is



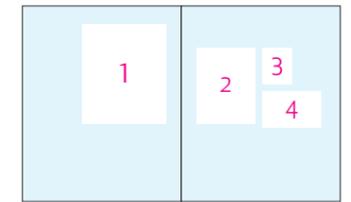
direct mail, so developing a device which might encourage the consumer to order monthly refills, possibly changing the formula of the product as their condition changes, was an attractive proposition.

From these years of collaboration and investigation has emerged E-Treatment – the first physical, retail-facing product to have been released by Sunstar as a result of its partnership with The Division. E-Treatment is a handheld haircare device that supports Sunstar's Equitance brand – a mid to up market brand that Tonge likens to Oil of Olay in a UK context.

The device employs electro-static technology (developed by Hitachi) to spray conditioner onto the user's hair. It is targeted at 40+ women with the key selling point being that the charged particles of conditioner stick to the hair for a longer time, thus improving the efficacy of the product.

"Sunstar wanted not just to sell conditioner but create something where you would feel inclined to keep refilling and hence buy more product," adds Tonge. "This product is a handheld device with a grippy shape and sophisticated looking form. In Japan people tend to have a bath in the evening rather than shower in morning so after your bath you grab hold of the E-Treatment and spray onto your hair."

A great deal of prototyping (all created in the UK by Solve 3D) was used throughout the design process, not least because the Sunstar chairman is blind (as a result of diabetes) and he wants to feel each and every design



- 1 | The E-treatment handheld hair care device
- 2 | E-Treatment in use
- 3 | E-Treatment with refill bottle
- 4 | Bespoke typography is inspired by the 1960s
- 5 | The Division founders Nicole Hodgkinson and David Tonge



iteration. Furthermore, The Division were responsible for helping Sunstar to establish relationships with manufacturing partners.

"What has been unusual about the relationship with Sunstar is that we were hired as designers to innovate, and we have actually helped the company hugely on business strategy," reflects Tonge. "We have asked what is the company's unique opportunity and helped them to understand internally what it takes from a resource viewpoint to build some of these things. This is fairly unusual for a designer; there are a lot of different elements to working with them."

The Division, in addition to E-Treatment, had previously developed a public information system on behalf of Sunstar – a robust static display for use in dental surgeries to educate and inform patients around better oral care. Looking ahead, Tonge believes that it is very likely that The Division will develop further devices for Sunstar – he mentions "the world's thinnest toothbrush" as one product under development.

"What's interesting about Sunstar is that we are finding out more and more about the other companies that they own," Tonge adds. "For example they own a company that makes milk cartons for cafes. The more we work with them we realise they have bits of technology and ideas all over the place and our aim is to bring those together to understand what new kinds of delivery mechanism might be possible." |