



# DRINK UP: A SOCIAL MARKETING SUCCESS STORY

An Initiative of the Partnership for a Healthier America

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2020



## Summary

Launched by Partnership for a Healthier America in 2013 and sunset in 2019, the Drink Up campaign boosted water consumption and bottled water sales across the nation, helping to make water the nation's number one beverage of choice. Using extensive market research, branding, and commercial marketing techniques, Drink Up promoted better public health with one simple message: drink more water, more often. At the heart of Drink Up's success was its focus on strategic partnerships to generate brand awareness. The campaign's simplicity allowed for versatile deployment strategies, such as branded products, in-person activations, targeted micro campaigns, and in-store promotions.

## Background



For years Coca-Cola has sold their product by connecting to the feelings of consumers.

For decades, public health campaigns were built around the idea that arming people with facts and information would motivate them to make lifestyle and behavioral changes. These largely educational campaigns have met with limited success, especially when up against competing messages. Those that have fared best, such as mass media campaigns discouraging tobacco use, succeeded in coordination with government policies such as higher taxes on tobacco products and community reinforcement like anti-tobacco programs in schools.

When it comes to achieving sustained changes to behavior through marketing and branding, nobody does it better than Madison Avenue. Commercial marketing campaigns succeed by connecting to consumers' emotions. They sell good feelings, rather than good sense. Thirsty? Coca Cola doesn't promise to quench your thirst, it promises happiness: Over the years, it has told us to, "Have a Coke and a smile," "Open Happiness," and then tapped into years of associating its product with happy memories by encouraging us to pop one open so we could once more, "Taste the Feeling."

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- Drew Nannis, former PHA Chief Marketing Officer



In 2013, Partnership for a Healthier America (PHA) Honorary Chair and former First Lady Michelle Obama set out to do something radical: she eschewed social marketing’s educational approach and, instead, asked if she could leverage commercial marketing tactics to better promote one simple action and substantially improve the public’s health.

The result? The Drink Up campaign, which told Americans “You are what you drink, and when you drink water, you Drink Up.” The campaign did not provide lengthy explanations as to why water is good for you. It did not tell you that sugary drinks are bad. It simply saturated the market with positive images and a compelling water droplet logo that promoted drinking water – lots of water – as often as possible.

And it worked. In 2017, water overtook soda as the most consumed beverage in America; it remains number one today.

## The National Campaign

To get started, PHA gathered a core group of leaders in the marketing industry who had worked on everything from political campaigns to Fortune Ten brands. Engaging top-level market researchers ultimately led to an invaluable partnership with Nielsen, a leading global market research and data analytics company.

nielsen

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“That partnership gave us access to amazing consumer data, which they did specifically for us,” said Drew Nannis, former PHA Chief Marketing Officer. “They tested logos and taglines and ad copy. It was a huge advantage for us that would have typically cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.”

PHA had Madison Avenue ambitions, but lacked a Madison Avenue-sized budget, so the group suggested a strategy that would allow for maximum impact with minimal investment. To change people’s beverage choices PHA needed to compete and succeed against Fortune 500 brands that spend billions on marketing yearly. “[The group] told us we were never going to outspend them. They have Ferraris. They said that we could build a Ferrari, which would be expensive, or we could build a bumper sticker and put it on all of their Ferraris,” said Nannis.

The “bumper sticker” approach, in this case, meant developing a logo that could be placed on existing bottled water and water-related products as well as near any place water was available, either for free or for purchase. PHA chose the water droplet logo for its clarity and simplicity.

Any company or organization that wanted to participate in the campaign was required to use the droplet logo. “Some did it out of self-interest, because they sold water,” said Nannis. “Some for health reasons and some for a combination of those reasons. We did not care why they were doing it. We said you have to carry this droplet on your labeling or packaging so it would become a ubiquitous mark.”

One challenge, he added, was determining who would not be allowed to use the logo. For example, companies could not use the logo to pass their product off as healthy if it was not. After much debate, the group decided only bottled water that was plain or lightly flavored with natural ingredients would be allowed to use the logo; those that added sweeteners or other ingredients would not be permitted to use it.

“We had to turn money away,” said Nannis.

Initially, these decisions did not please the beverage industry or public health advocates, said Nannis. “We had no friends. Some said we weren’t being flexible enough and others said we were being too flexible. So, we figured maybe we were doing something right.”



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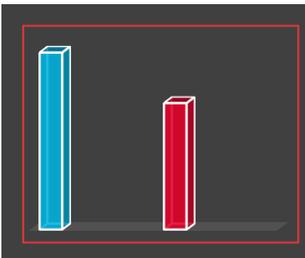
Following the commercial marketing playbook, the team chose a simple, positive, and straightforward message.

## Simple and Positive

When it came to developing a slogan, the team followed the commercial marketing playbook: Rather than telling people what not to drink, or how much water they should drink each day, they chose a simple, positive, straightforward message, "You are what you drink. When you drink water, you Drink Up."

## It's All About Exposure

Within its first year, Drink Up engaged hundreds of millions of people through extensive digital advertising, social media, events, celebrity outreach, on-site activations, and other engagements. The logo and taglines were carried by nearly 50 supporters across the water community. They appeared on bottled water packs, refillable water bottles, delivery trucks, filters, and outdoor taps and fountains. Social media reach extended into the hundreds of millions via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. PHA also launched a website, [YouAreWhatYouDrink.org](http://YouAreWhatYouDrink.org). Michelle Obama, along with celebrities such as Eva Longoria, James Franco, and John Legend, gave the brand a major boost.



People exposed to the ads purchased 1.8 million dollars more bottled water than the control group.

"We wanted to show that women are really unstoppable. They have so much in their day, they have taken on so many responsibilities, but they are unstoppable. Water becomes the fuel for their bodies to keep them unstoppable."

-Rudy Bozas, Pólvora's  
CEO and President



Ads like this ran at bus stops in Chicago. In the image, the sign pointing to Muhammad Ali's glass of water reads, "No wonder he never lost a press conference. Water. So talented yet so humble."

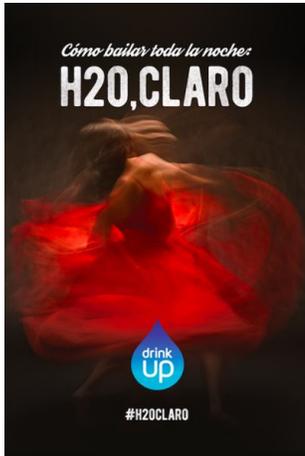
The results spoke for themselves. Within a year of the September 2013 launch, consumer testing by Nielsen found the use of the droplet in a supermarket setting had produced a 3% lift in bottled water sales. "People were not only increasing their purchase of water, they were simultaneously decreasing their purchase of soda and juice. We were doing exactly what we wanted to do," said Nannis.

The second year the ads ran, people exposed to them purchased 4% more bottled water and filters than those who did not see the ads. This represented \$1.8 million worth of additional water sales. "For every ad dollar invested in the campaign, there was a \$6 return on investment in incremental water sales," said Nannis.

Then, in 2017, water became the number one consumed beverage in America. "While not entirely the doing of the Drink Up campaign, there's no question it played a role," he said.

## Drink Up East LA/Toma Mas Agua

In December 2016, the American Beverage Association (ABA) invested in a hyper-targeted version of Drink Up focused on five zip codes in the East Los Angeles market where 97% of the population was Hispanic/Latino.



In the East LA zip codes where ads like this ran, awareness of the Drink Up campaign rose by 77%, with recognition of the droplet logo rising from 27% to 42%.



Images like this were accompanied by the message, "Be unstoppable. Drink more water, any type of water."

Research has shown that low income individuals and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by obesity and diet-related disease. Consumption of sugary drinks was particularly high in markets like East LA, according to research conducted by the Natural Marketing Institute (NMI).

With support from the ABA, PHA teamed-up with Pólvara Advertising to run an 18-month campaign in Spanish and English aimed at Latinas in this market. The campaign focused on Latina women because of their pivotal role in Hispanic households as the primary grocery shoppers and decision makers, said Pólvara CEO and President Rudy Bozas.

"They are the primary gatekeeper of anything that comes into the house," he said. Pólvara recommended the ads focus on the high energy level Latina women needed to perform their many roles throughout the day. "We wanted to show that women are really unstoppable," said Bozas. "They have so much in their day, they have taken on so many responsibilities, but they are unstoppable. Water becomes the fuel for their bodies to keep them unstoppable," he said.

The ads depicted women engaged in high-energy activities that require hydration, such as yoga and dancing. They chose a theme, "unstoppable," and a tagline, "H2OClaro." They knew the tagline would resonate with both Latinos and Latinas because it played off the Spanish expression "más claro ni el agua," which means that something is crystal clear. The tagline was used as a hashtag in social media posts and further explained in the ads: "How to balance home and work: H2O, of course. Drink water. Any type of water. You are what you drink."

The campaign ran ads on social media and billboards, in local supermarkets, and at local parades and other community events. Over the course of 18 months, awareness of the Drink Up campaign rose 77% in the target market, with recognition of the droplet logo rising from 27% to 42% among target audiences.

More than three-fourths of those surveyed by NMI said the campaign had a positive effect on their water consumption; nine out of 10 respondents said they were trying to drink more water and had purchased bottled water over the past month. The survey also showed a slight increase in water consumption among children.

When asked to recall where they learned about Drink Up, survey respondents most often credited social media and seeing the droplet logo on water bottles. Bozas attributed the campaign's success to its culturally relevant messaging.

"When you want to affect a local community, you have to think about it from a hyper local standpoint," said Bozas. "The more relevant you can be to that subsegment, the more effective you are going to be."

## Convenience Stores



The #H2OfCourse hashtag echoed the simple message and tone of the campaign.

In 2016, PHA acquired its first convenience store (c-store) partner, Kwik Trip, and began building a relationship with the National Association of Convenience Stores (NACS). “That’s when we learned that 50 percent of all single serve bottled water was sold in c-stores,” said Amaris Bradley, a registered dietitian and former Director of Partnerships at PHA. From NACS, PHA also learned that one in two American consumers visit a c-store every day, and 65% of the items they purchase are consumed immediately, with 85% of their purchases consumed within the hour.

“There was a clear link there. That’s when we started to connect the dots and realized they were a prime environment for activating Drink Up in stores,” said Bradley.

Kwik Trip, which had its own bottled water label, added the droplet logo to their single serve and gallon-size bottles and put the logo and messaging on cooler door clings and other in-store signage. Doing so heavily raised the visibility of the Drink Up campaign, because “bottled water is a huge category for them,” said Bradley.



## Drink Up: A Social Marketing Success Story

Bradley attributes Kwik Trip's success to "the blanketing of Drink Up materials all over the store. If you were a customer coming in, you'd see the Drink Up message in the beverage aisle. Those exposed to the campaign were more likely to purchase and consume water than those who were not exposed to it. It's marketing."

Building upon this success, PHA incorporated the Drink Up campaign into its partnership agreements with all c-stores, making it easy for them to promote water consumption by providing floor and cooler clings and use of the logo on their own bottled water brands. By the time the Drink Up campaign sunset in 2019, it had been activated by five c-store chains and five distributors partnering with PHA.

"Getting c-stores to embrace the Drink Up campaign, coupled with their promotion of healthier food offerings, was a huge success for PHA and has helped to transform the image of c-stores in America," said Bradley.

"The industry was known for cokes and smokes," she said. "For them to market bottled water, that's the revolutionary part."



# Sunsetting the Campaign

In 2019, PHA sunset the Drink Up campaign. “Drink Up created a sustained shift in the marketplace that had a lasting influence on consumer behavior,” said Nancy Roman, PHA President & CEO. “It’s important to celebrate and acknowledge success. Drink Up did exactly what we hoped it would. We’re eager to build on this great experience.”

PHA continues to deploy its FNV (Fruits N’ Veggies) social marketing campaign both digitally and in-retail settings to encourage consumers to choose fruits and vegetables.



## KEYS TO SUCCESS:

### 1. Build the Bumper Sticker, Not the Whole Ferrari.

If you don’t have a Madison Avenue-sized budget, trying to compete with companies that spend billions on advertising makes little sense. Instead, craft a campaign that can piggyback off existing products already being marketed.

### 2. Don't Be Afraid to Say No.

Don’t do anything or enter into any partnerships that will dilute the value of what you’re promoting. Authenticity is key.

### 3. Listen to Your Audience and Speak Their Language.

If it’s not culturally relevant, you won’t get through. Find images and metaphors that resonate with your audience and take your campaign to the places they live, work and play.

### 4. Keep It Simple, Short and Sweet.

People remember simple directives (Drink Up!) and will act on them. Don’t make your message overly complicated.

### 5. Don’t Educate – Sell Good Feelings.

Social marketing campaigns built around education aren’t as effective as campaigns that tap into people’s emotions. You don’t have to explain why water is good to make people want it.