

A PUKKA PROBLEM

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DIAGEO

PIMM'S®

SUMMARY

For ten years she had resented having to order wine with Indian food - just because she didn't drink beer...

This is the story of one planner's personal thirst, and self-imposed mission, to persuade Diageo that there was a gap in the market for an alternative to lager with curry - and how one of their products was perfectly poised to fill it.

THIS IS THE STORY OF HOW PIMM'S BECAME 'PUKKA'.

It tells how years of trying to get a meeting with the Pimm's brand team, and months pulling together research in stolen time, finally culminated in a single strategic presentation that demonstrated why Pimm's, that classic, highly-seasonal, summer drink favoured at Henley and Wimbledon, was the perfect accompaniment for that most British cuisine - curry. It outlines the argument that led Diageo to invest in a whole new usage occasion that could reduce Pimm's dependency on the unreliable British Summer and change the shape of its business forever.

Ultimately, it's about planning at its most entrepreneurial, where a strategy with "influence" not only created a compelling case but also the *impetus* to solve a problem for which no one had expected, or even asked for, an answer.

199 words

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PLANNER ON A MISSION

I had spent two years trying to get this meeting and ten years thinking about it. Here I was, at last, in the foyer of the Diageo building, cold-calling someone else's client about a brand I didn't work on. And why? For the frankly nut-job reason that I just had to get this idea off my chest.

Most Brits know Pimm's as a lovely gin-based spirit that is ritualistically mixed with lemonade, fruit, cucumber and mint to celebrate the arrival of that most precious thing: the Great British Summer. From May to September the cry of "It's Pimm's O'clock" heralds the arrival of even the weakest sunshine thanks to a 1990s advertising campaign that passed into popular culture. Pimm's *means* summer in the British psyche and the strength of this association makes it a brand most would envy.

Yet here I was in the Diageo lobby, about to tell the Pimm's brand team that all their good work could be better.



PIMM'S: HOSTAGE TO BRITISH SUMMER TIME



Let's face it; the Great British Summer is *so* elusive sometimes it doesn't really happen at all. Certainly this is bad for public morale, but when 80% of your sales are bound up in the summer months it can also be very bad for business. Pimm's strength is ironically its greatest weakness: it is hostage to the weatherman.

This sunshine-dependency has historically seen Diageo seek to "weather-proof" the business with variants. Yet whilst some, like Winter Pimm's, have enjoyed success, none has given the brand

sustainable business growth beyond its five month straitjacket.

More importantly, why go to the expense of developing new products when the original Pimm's No.1 Cup, is already... perfection? Instead of launching new propositions why not give the British public a reason to enjoy a drink they already know and love *more often*, by looking towards a new usage occasion outside of summer?

It just so happened that was exactly what I wanted to propose they do.

NO.1 CUP AND CURRY: A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

As a non-beer drinker, my alcohol choice in an Indian restaurant is essentially “red or white?” Now, I like wine as much as the next person - but not with Indian food. I’ll admit I’m a fusspot, but my taste buds hate being forced to drink wine with curry, and the planner in me gets really frustrated seeing a gap in the market. Lager lovers get the chilled refreshment that *Cobra, Tiger, Kingfisher* bring to spicy food. So where was my default brand in this market? Why should I be denied a long, refreshing, alcoholic drink that could actually compliment and quell the fire of my Bhuna - *just because I don’t drink beer?*

Like many British people I enjoy “going for an Indian” and for as long as I have been drinking alcohol, I have drunk Pimm’s with curry. Although it would make for a better story, there was no revelatory moment when I realised the combination worked. It’s simply something I know, and while I could wax lyrical about the balance of sugars and spices that make Pimm’s so palate cleansing, the truth is ultimately in the tasting. It’s delicious.

So after ten years of meals in curry houses that had never heard of Pimm’s, drinking dreadful wine or, worse still, Coke, my motivation that day at Diageo was a tiny bit selfish: availability. That said, I didn’t want this perfect pairing to just be “my thing”; I wanted it to be more widely recognised and enjoyed. Ten years hence it would be great to walk into any curry house from Brick Lane to Burnley and be able to order a Pimm’s. And in weather proofing Pimm’s it would also be amazing to have helped boost year round sales.

HOMEMADE RESEARCH: PROVING IT “WASN’T JUST ME”

As with any personal quest, I did it in my spare time. I used my agency’s resources to summon up as much qualitative and quantitative research as I could find outside my day-job. There was one imperative. I had to demonstrate why this idea was bigger than just one woman’s frustrations. A nugget of TGI data sang out: 36% of British drinkers don’t drink beer. More than a third of British boozers, 14.5million people don’t drink beer. I wasn’t alone.

A filmed interview with the head bartender from high-end Indian restaurant Dishoom (where “Bombay Pimm’s” happened to be their most popular cocktail) explained the science: high tannin content in wine made it unpalatable with Indian food because the tannins “excite the spice in your mouth,” he explained, “making a hot curry feel hotter”.

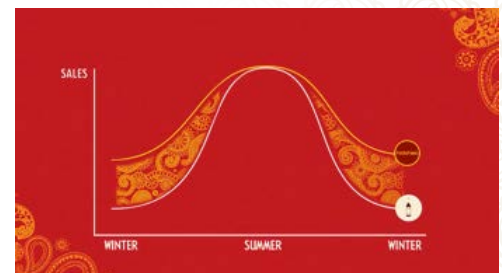
A lunchtime research group of beer-rejecters didn’t know about tannins, but they did know that they usually drank wine with curry “even though they didn’t really like it”. Cider bloated them and spirits were “too strong with a meal”. They were also painfully aware of the social norm around beer and that “no one wants to be the idiot ordering a vodka Coke in an Indian restaurant”.

A home-edited film of these beer-rejecters eating an Indian takeaway showed a suboptimal set they of choices they hadn't questioned, and concluded by revealing their reactions when offered Pimm's with their curry. Murmurs of approval quickly turned to outright conversion.

THERE MIGHT BE SOMETHING IN THIS: THE DIAGEO REACTION

I had spent 2 tricky years trying to get a "way in" to meet with Pimm's, and there were no immediately obvious "prizes" for my effort because there had been no "client brief". The immediate benefit, having presented the idea, would be that I'd never have to bore people with it again. I could at least say I had tried.

But magically the client team had never before seen the opportunity laid out before them. This strategy, they enthused, could exploit a whole new market to help change the shape of the Pimm's business by reducing its dependence on good weather and flattening the sales curve. It could make it "Pimm's O'clock" all year round.



HANGING ON NEWS: A NAIL-BITING WAIT

That meeting with Pimm's took place in August. After a month of total silence, then a trickle of emails, on 9th October, I stood at my 30th birthday party overwhelmed by good news. The clients wanted to give us a trial investment of £30,000 to "test & learn" and see if this was something they should invest in further. Something to celebrate!

ONE MONTH TO PROVE OUR CASE

So, we had some money; we had the will to do something special, but to meet the client's expectations we needed to activate before year-end. We had one month to prove to Diageo that the coupling of Pimm's with Curry could be a winner in the UK market.

There were client provisos.

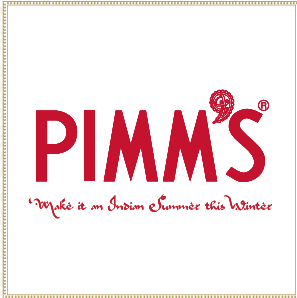
Firstly, the "perfect serve" – the summer ritual of mixing Pimm's in pitchers – would need to be protected. To separate this activity and to focus on the purity of the Pimm's *taste*, the humble pre-mixed "picnic can" was about to have its moment.

Secondly we had to protect the aspirational qualities of the brand, this was *Pimm's* after all. We needed to build associations with high quality Indian food, not downmarket "meat curries". Quality control was vital.

Lastly, the Anglo-Indian relationship, stretching back to the Raj and Empire was both

creatively inspirational and dangerous. No one wants to be an Imperialist in this day and age. Pimm's with curry felt like a natural quirk of modern Britain, but balance was key.

ENTER 'TEAM BOMBAY'



I begged, stole and borrowed a small team to help me: creative, account management, social and PR.

We quickly got to our call to action: "Make it an Indian Summer this Winter, with Pimm's". And the strategy even gave birth to a new version of the sacred logo by adding a "bindified" version of the all-important apostrophe.

SERENDIPITY AND CELEBRITY: THE 'PUKKA PIMM'S POP-UP' IS BORN

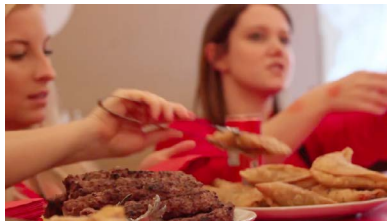
The goal was to get people sampling Pimm's with curry. And by luck, our social manager happened to know someone with a venue opposite the top of Brick Lane's "curry curve". He could do us a deal. Friends and colleagues would help us set up and staff a pop-up diner where we could hand out Pimm's with delicious Indian delicacies to passers-by for their approval.

A chance encounter in my local pub brought in the final missing ingredient to elevate the PR.

Hardeep Singh Kohli - Anglo-Indian chef, comedian and broadcaster - was to become much more than just a "celebrity ambassador" - he was all-round brand consultant helping us source the food for sampling. It was even Hardeep who came up with the name of our pop-up - Pukka Pimm's.



A POSITIVE IMPACT ON CUSTOMERS (AND SOME UNINTENDED INFLUENCE)



We estimate 500 consumers came through the doors of Pukka Pimms between December 4-6th 2014. Of the 186 we surveyed, 84% said they enjoyed the combination of Pimm's and curry, and 78% would both try it again and recommend it to a friend. Consumer appetite for the idea was realised. I wasn't alone!

40 journalists and food bloggers attended our invite-only dinner hosted by Hardeep and subsequently wrote about the surprisingly good

combination of flavours. So, just before Christmas, at the busiest time in the PR calendar, with less than a month's notice, we had managed to pull a rabbit from a hat. A full-page Metro article sealed our proof of media appetite for the idea.

And there was one more important audience we hadn't explicitly figured into our hastily formed plans: Diageo internal stakeholders. Even the most cynical, lager-loving guys in the sales team were seduced by the combination of Pimm's and curry and have subsequently begun proactively approaching Indian wholesalers - even creating their own trade press advertising.

They're not just excited about the potential of filling the "beer-rejecter" gap and the "white space" offered by 10,000 Indian restaurants in the UK. They're also excited about *another gap*, given business is heavily skewed towards the South. As one Diageo FD put it, "this is just what we need to push Pimm's *North of the Watford Gap*".



PAIR PIMM'S WITH YOUR SPICY DISHES AND WATCH YOUR PROFITS GROW

OVER 14.5 MILLION UK DRINKERS DON'T DRINK BEER, SO WHEN THEY EAT AN INDIAN MEAL, THERE'S AN OPPORTUNITY TO OFFER THEM SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

Introducing a PIMM'S and curry pairing: the refreshing cooling gin-based, fruity drink. A perfect palate-cleansing accompaniment to spicy food. And don't just take our word for it, here's what our staff at our own Pukka Pimms Pop-Up dining experience.

THE BEST WAY TO SERVE PIMM'S
Mix 50ml of Pimm's with ice and lemonade, and garnish with a slice of cucumber. Or serve in the perfectly rimmed cans.

84%
LOVED THE
COMBINATION
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PIMM'S

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2,300
SPICY DISHES
CONSUMED

	PIMM'S	GLASS	PIMM'S CAN
750ml bottle/average can cost	£9.50*	£1.17*	
Cost per serve (500ml/serve)	£3.68	£1.17	
MSRP per serve	£4.00	£2.99	
Gross margin per serve	£2.35	£1.82	
Profit Margins	77%	67%	

*Source: UK Beer Group Index (2014)
*Figures reflect average prices by supermarket standards and are for guidance purposes only.

HOORAY! it's PIMM'S O'CLOCK
ASK YOUR LOCAL LANDMARK REPRESENTATIVE ABOUT THE PROMOTIONAL SUPPORT YOU COULD GET

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CURRYING FAVOUR: THE EVER-EXPANDING INFLUENCE OF PUKKA PIMM'S

So what next? Stock has already been assigned for further commercial trials and expectations are high within Diageo for the future of this new pairing. Amazing to think it was all set in motion by one solitary strategic presentation, one August day.

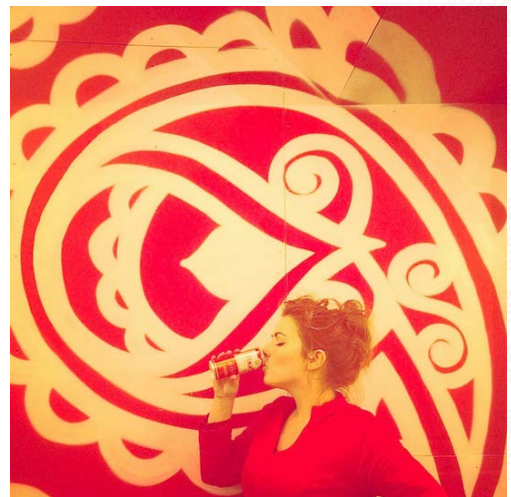
Of course, the way the Pukka Pimm's came about could make it easy to dismiss as a one off – the personal mission of one Pimm's-crazed planner - though it seems to me there are some clear lessons for anyone willing to take my word for it.

SOME PUKKA LESSONS FOR PLANNING

In today's world, planning is not about waiting for the perfect client with the perfect problem to come to you. Today, planning needs to be *as* entrepreneurial as the world we live in, and entrepreneurial planners should never stop planning - not at work, home or even in the local curry house. We should keep our eyes open for the “gaps” wherever we see them. And we need to be inherently influential to make sure we get those gaps filled.

And perhaps there's a lesson for agencies. We often talk about honest client relationships being a condition for great work - yet we run “new business” like a Victorian dating agency. We rely on lengthy marriage proposals and dowries, rather than starting with magic and love. Maybe if we followed our hearts more often and actually made the initial approach, at least *sometimes*; maybe if we invested in new relationships with clients whose problems we *want* to solve; maybe if we did those things, we would all be better off for it.

That's just my view, but I truly believe planning is at a crossroads of creative influence. And if we just continue to follow our hunches and our hearts, who knows what we can achieve?



1996 words