

Marketing Society Awards



Category: **PURPOSE-DRIVEN BRANDS**

The problem: fading brand relevance was dragging down sales

97% of households in the UK use detergent¹, and the frequency of washing loads per household runs at one every other day².

And yet no one likes thinking about or doing the laundry; it's a low interest category which to win in, brands have to somehow be salient and relevant.

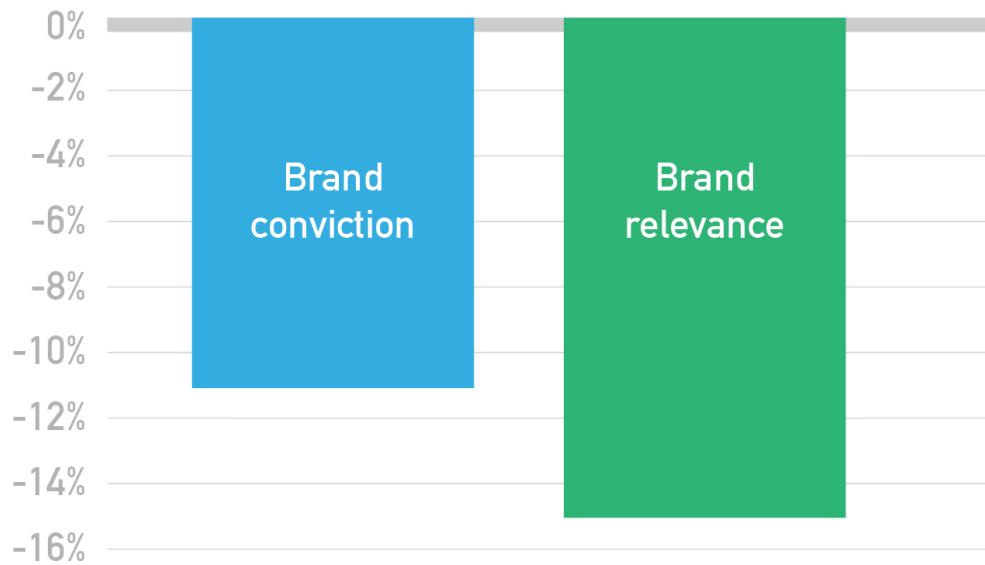
Historically Persil had been very successful at this (so much so that as a teenager in the 1980s Victoria Beckham declared that she wanted to be "as famous as Persil Automatic"). And in the late 90s we achieved cultural relevance by disrupting the category (which focused on clothes which are whiter than white), with our belief that 'Dirt is good' and a mission to get kids playing more and getting dirty.



But in recent times Persil had started to struggle. Brand conviction and brand relevance were seeing steep declines...

¹ Euromonitor 2016

² TNS Kantar Worldpanel Data



Source: Millward Brown 2015-16

...And as a result value sales were suffering. We were declining -0.8%³ whilst a couple of our major competitors were flying (Surf, for instance, had grown a whopping 8.6%⁴.)

It seemed our focus on championing dirt and outdoor play was no longer working. But why? What had changed?

The reason: Outdoor time (the very thing Persil celebrates in its communications) had been heavily eroded by indoor time in the last decade. Our brand was portraying childhood in a way that no longer aligned with reality.

We started looking at the cultural context. We knew that times were changing and saw that the adoption of technology, increase in safety fears, and the increase in structured activity were all impacting children's lives. But we hadn't appreciated how much. *In fact, we found that kids' outdoor time had more than halved in the last fifteen years*⁵.

So whilst parents still loved seeing our world of outdoor play, it was nostalgic, a nice to have that was often not practical in reality. *Our purpose of getting kids outside had lost its meaning.*

Even more interesting were the studies being written on the issues associated with children being stuck indoors and *not* getting outdoor play. These studies showed how if children are denied outdoor play, the development of the pre-frontal cortex (the brain's executive control centre, which has a critical role in regulating emotions, making plans and solving problems) is impaired. In fact, too little outdoor play is

³ Nielson 2016 – MAT April 16 vs. April 15, Persil value sales

⁴ Euromonitor 2016

⁵ Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health 2010; Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity 2015

linked to everything from decreased attention span, anxiety, impaired social skills, hyper-aggression, to mental health issues.

Essentially, dirt was no longer just good. It was critical.

Here lay an interesting tension.

We believed that if Persil could reignite its' purpose – if we could convince people that dirt is critical and encourage more parents to let their kids go outside and get dirty - it stood a chance of winning back relevance and, therefore, the market.

Our communications objectives became clear. We needed to reignite Persil's brand purpose and:

- 1/ Provoke our audience and get them to pay attention to the issue and our brand belief
- 2/ Educate people on why outdoor play is so important
- 3/ Facilitate real change and get more kids outdoors

Through this we aimed to achieve our marketing objectives of increasing brand relevance and credibility and our business objectives of increasing value share, sales, and winning more washes.

The strategy: Get parents' attention by comparing kids to prisoners

Whilst the decrease in children's outdoor time was substantial, it had happened over a fairly long period of time. This presented us with a problem: people rarely notice change when it occurs gradually. In order to get people's attention, we would have to create a sense of urgency that would instantly force parents to reassess - especially as we had substantially less media firepower than our main competitors⁶ to shout with.

In conjunction with our PR partner Edelman, we conducted proprietary research with 12,000 parents in order to gain more insight. Out of the many findings, one nugget stood out as the simplest distillation of the issue: kids now spend less than an hour outside each day⁷.

But without context, such statistics can be meaningless: is one hour outside good? Bad? Mediocre? How do we know what is right for a child?

We explored numerous ways to explain and contextualise the fact, from forecasting future declines to highlighting the skills kids miss out on learning when they don't have enough outdoor playtime.

Our breakthrough came when we compared the situation for children with a population whose time outdoors is deliberately restricted: prison inmates.

⁶ Ebiquity 2016

⁷ Edelman Berland 2016

UN Human Rights guideline 21.1 stipulates: "Every prisoner who is not employed in outdoor work shall have at least one hour of suitable exercise in the open air daily."⁸ This right applies even to maximum-security prisoners.

Our startling insight emerged: children spend less time outdoors than prisoners.

This was the match we needed to set the campaign alight.

The approach: Use NGO partners and trusted figures of authority to give a credible voice to our rallying cry

Today's parents are a sceptical bunch when it comes to marketing. They are more inundated with messaging than any generation in history. Our message, true and shocking though it was, risked being dismissed if it was to come purely from Persil.

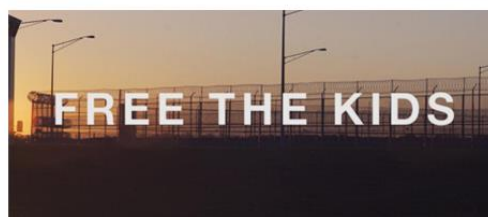
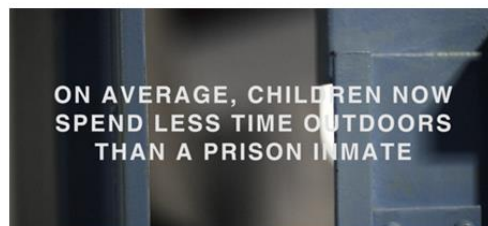
We decided to largely eschew traditional media and instead reach our audience through more credible sources including NGO partners, trusted authority figures, social video, earned - news oriented - media and word of mouth.

This would ensure our message was taken seriously.

The idea: A) We would 'FREE THE KIDS' by enlisting the help of prisoners to grab attention

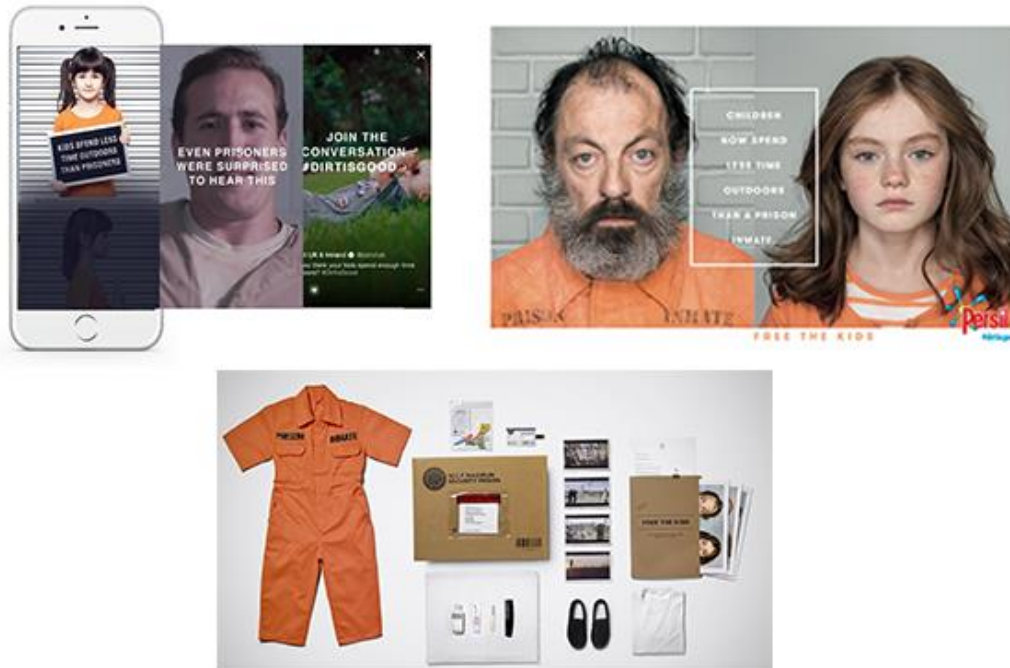
Our idea was to get inside a real prison. It was the kind of idea that seemed both obvious and shockingly original - especially for a category as dull as detergent.

We found a real maximum-security prison in Wabash, Indiana that allowed us in to film and interview some of the inmates. After hearing the prisoners talk about how important outdoor time is to them, we revealed our shocking stat and captured their disbelief on camera. There was no way influencers, the media and parents could ignore our message if they heard it coming from prisoners themselves.



⁸ UNHCR Guidelines 2016

As the mini-documentary was launched online and in cinemas, we also promoted the UK's first Twitter Moment for newsworthiness and buzz around our statistic, we sent direct mail 'kids prisoner kits' to key influencers to get them talking online, and we stopped commuters in their tracks with a striking back-page print placement in the *Metro* and *Evening Standard*.



The idea: B) We enlisted authoritative partners to educate people on the importance of outdoor play

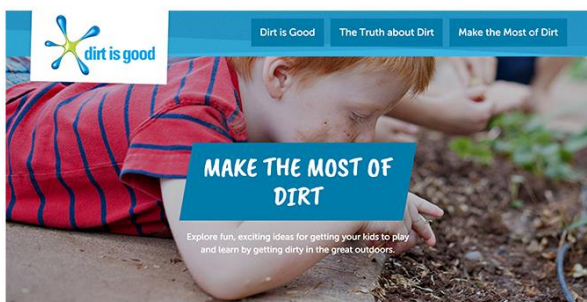
We then enlisted an authoritative partner in the form of Sir Ken Robinson, the world's leading expert on child development and play. He chaired our newly formed 'Dirt is Good' board of experts and released guidelines outlining why all kids need outdoor play every day; these were promoted via a live Periscope stream and supporting content on launch day. We knew we needed to have credibility with parents and organisations if they were going to take on board our message, and Sir Ken provided this.



The idea: C) We developed tools and enlisted the help of teachers to facilitate action

Relevance wasn't our only issue with consumers: conviction was. Today's parents can see through brands that don't walk the walk. There was no way we could add another problem into parents' lives and not do anything about it.

The first step was to encourage parents directly to get their kids outside more by providing inspiration, practical tips and an explanation of the benefits of outdoor play. Our custom-built website did just that. And in conjunction with our partner, The Wild Network, we created an app - 'Persil Wild Explorers' - which gave parents over 100 ideas to get kids outside. The app was promoted on pack with special edition sleeves and gifts, as well as through point-of-sale and e-commerce.



But with kids spending most of their waking lives indoors in school, we knew this was the real opportunity to start making a difference. We partnered with Project Dirt for an initiative called 'Empty Classroom Day' on 17th June 2016, in which schools teach all their lessons outside. We used our online channels to drive sign-ups by both parents and teachers. By seeing how much fun the outdoors can be on this one day, we hoped the wheels would start rolling towards longer-term change.



The results: we got the issue onto the nation's agenda, we got kids outside for 774,000 more hours, and - the icing on the cake - we won back both relevance and sales for Persil

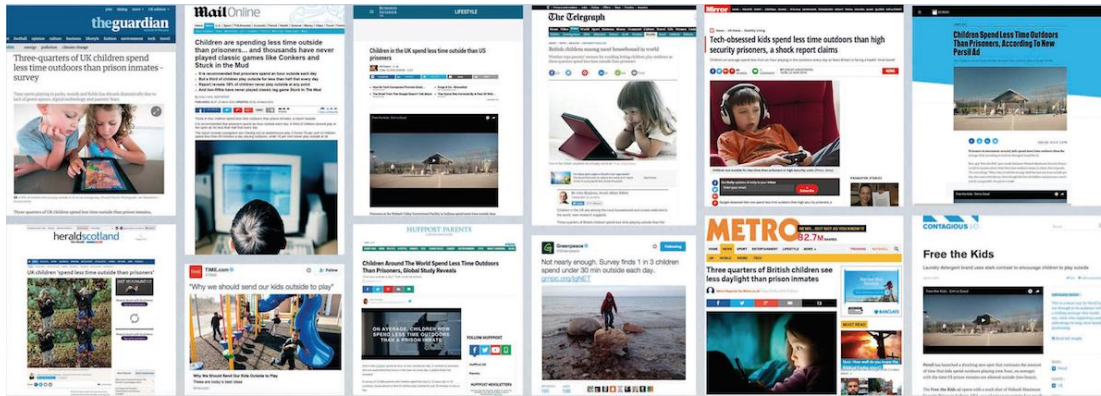
Our spend was significantly less than our main competitors: Vanish and Ariel enjoyed the lion's share of media support in the laundry category with 31% and 14% of the total pie, versus only 9% for Persil⁹.

We therefore knew that media attention would be critical to the campaign's success: widespread press coverage was necessary to earn our reach, as we couldn't just buy it, and the coverage had to come from the right sources to ensure that our message was credible to discerning parents.

Grab attention + Educate

The press attention we generated - over 70 articles - surpassed our Unilever-set benchmark by 67%, and included some of the most prestigious news publications out there.

⁹ Ebiquity 2016



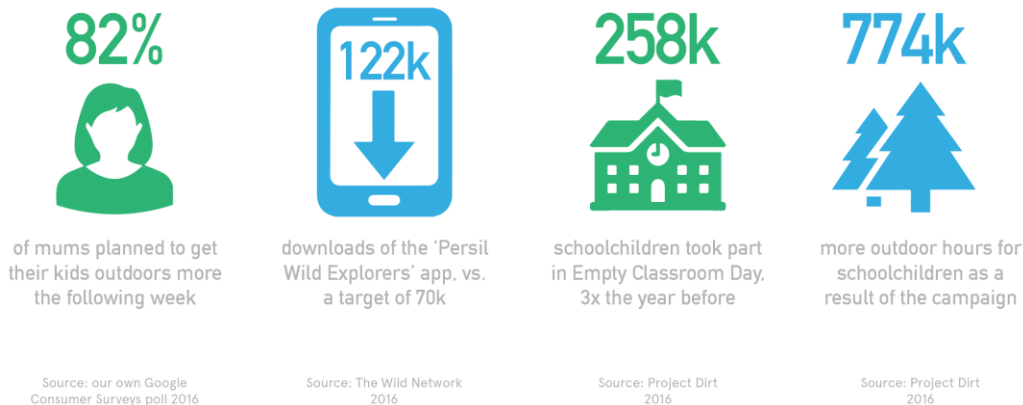
This was combined with a high level of campaign visibility and interaction:

- 22.6million Twitter impressions, 3million over the Unilever benchmark
- 450,000+ views of the mini-documentary on YouTube
- A social engagement rate (an aggregate of likes, comments and shares) 33% higher than the Unilever benchmark
- 17k visits to the new Dirt is Good website, with an average dwell time of over 2 minutes, comfortably beating our Unilever benchmark

And a nice bit of creative industry recognition too: 4 Cannes Lions, a Campaign BIG award, an LIA award and a Shark award.

Facilitate action

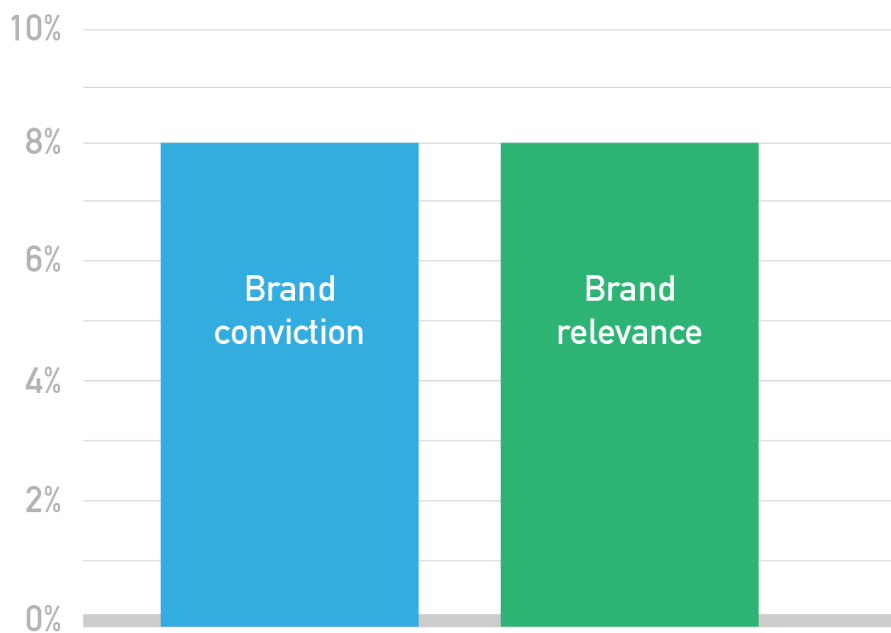
Through the attention-grabbing campaign and through initiatives with partners, we managed to create real change and get kids outside both in the school day and outside it:



Furthermore, 63% of people who saw the campaign could later associate it with Persil¹⁰.

In the three months following the campaign (to September 2016), both relevance and conviction had already shot up:

¹⁰ Twitter ProMo 2016



Source: Millward Brown 2016

And after a year in decline, the three months to September 2016 already saw some impressive business results:



Source: Nielsen, 3 months to Sept 2016 vs. previous 3 months

Persil was back in its rightful place: on top of the laundry pile.

Conclusion: a new lease of life for Persil and the kids of Britain

Persil had lost relevance with parents and was haemorrhaging sales as a result.

The reason was that, whilst we had long proclaimed our belief that 'Dirt is Good' and shown happy images of kids running free outside, we had completely ignored the newfound reality: that kids were increasingly kept inside.

After using proprietary research to uncover a single statistic, and finding an unexpected way of contextualising it, we enlisted the help of prisoners to get the issue that children weren't spending enough time outside onto the nation's agenda. We also enlisted the help of partners, parents and teachers to get kids outside for 770,000 more hours. And we attributed all that cultural leadership back to Persil, helping to reverse our declining sales and actually gain 12million more washes.

But what's most exciting is this has just been the first chapter of a longer story. The world is only getting more tech and safety obsessed. The role of Persil to fight for real outdoor play and to drive that change until it is fully adopted has just begun.

