

TOM DENYARD

UNILEVER UK LIMITED

Social media and a little extra bravery catapulted one marketer and a 100-year-old brand to new heights.

> BY JILL RIVKIN

Attending meetings in eerie Victorian buildings, sending communications in Old English and bringing mysterious groups of people together for invitation-only, underground events are ordinary occurrences for Tom Denyard. After all, he is one of the founders of a secret society.

Denyard's clandestine "Marmarati" group was established just over six months ago as part of a marketing campaign to launch a new variety of the more-than-100-year-old brand Marmite. Marmite itself is an extremely polarizing and long-beloved/hated brand of yeast-based spread common in the UK and owned by Unilever UK Limited. Denyard is the marketing manager overseeing Marmite and four other brands operating under the Inc² Brands umbrella. And, surprisingly, he's also a self-proclaimed "hater" of the product. >

**BRAND
INNOVATORS**¹⁰



➤ **Hand-dipped in black wax, these limited-edition jars were delivered to deeply-loyal Marmite fans to announce the release of the brand's Marmite XO variety.**

"I would rather stick pins in my eyes than eat the product," he says, straight-faced. But he is, undoubtedly, a "lover" of the brand.

As for the Marmarati endeavor, despite some initial "nervousness," Denyard says the highly untraditional campaign created "huge intrigue and huge excitement" for the brand, capitalizing on a powerful combination of social media, strong marketing planning and exquisite packaging. Denyard emphasizes that in marketing this heritage brand—and the new Marmite XO variety that was the basis of the campaign—he and his team "pushed the boundaries in a way we haven't considered before."

➤ **A NOT-SO-SECRET SOCIETY**

To find the first initiates for the Marmarati secret society, Denyard says his social media agency "we are social canvassed" Facebook and Twitter, as well as the more widespread



blogsphere, to identify the brand's most loyal fans—the ones that not only love the brand, but speak about it at length online. Once the top 30 people were singled out, the covert society took shape with a top-secret taste test behind shrouded doors—an intense and magical focus group with Marmite enthusiasts, if you will.

This elite group delivered invaluable feedback and was welcomed—and encouraged—to build on the "conversation" they already were generating—the truest sense of buzz marketing. They were in at the ground-floor of development for Marmite XO, and they had an influence on taste, image and packaging throughout the 4.5-month lead-in to the mass market launch, which happened in March.

Much of the buzz spread from an Internet forum that Denyard and his team established, but then intentionally turned over to the founding members of the Marmarati.

"This all kick-started an unexpectedly big monster," Denyard says. "There's a much bigger group of people involved in this process than expected, but we've handed over some of the ownership and control to the community."

Everything from the taste profile of Marmite XO to packaging design feedback spread through this community, and eventually a "second circle" of Marmarati members was established to broaden exposure of the upcoming product launch.

NAME: Tom Denyard

TITLE: marketing manager, Incs² Brands

YEARS IN CURRENT JOB: 7 months in current role, 5.5 years at Unilever

BEST ADVICE YOU EVER RECEIVED: It came from my dad, who said, "When you're flying and everything is going (almost too) well, enjoy it but make sure you take a little look over your shoulder, it's good to know what's coming next."

WHAT BRANDS DO YOU ADMIRE? Cadbury. They've done a remarkable job in taking the Cadbury name and translating it to a master brand for a portfolio of brands that are stronger for it. At the other end of the spectrum is Patek Philippe, the Swiss watch manufacturer. There's a lovely history of that pursuit for excellence... it's always been all about beauty, precision and elegance.

WHAT'S ON YOUR NIGHTSTAND?

A copy of *The Economist*. Always a book—a novel. Alarm clock—I am an early riser.

> LOVE IT OR HATE IT

The impetus for the Marmarati campaign came about 15 years ago, when Marmite marketers went to the heart of the brand with a campaign focused on the brand truth—you either love it or hate it (or love to hate it).

“[Marmite] is incredibly polarizing,” Denyard says. “Some literally can’t get enough, like a drug, and some literally want to scratch their eyeballs out because it is so offensive to them.”

This “love it/hate it” brand message anchored the brand and inspired its enthusiasts, and it was sustainable. But today’s team of marketers was certain there could be more—a way in which the campaign could take on a new life through new media.

The intensity with which “lovers” expressed their views of Marmite was already evident, with more than 250,000 members on the brand’s “love” page on Facebook. Denyard and his team were able to generate conversation among these fans by leaking information on the packaging (to maintain the mystical nature of the campaign) and the upcoming launch of Marmite XO. Since the campaign launched, the numbers have blossomed to 350,000 “lovers” of the brand and 150,000 fans on a new “hate” page that recreates the Love It/Hate It campaign that is at the brand’s core.

Social media, Denyard reminds us, is all about starting conversations and “creating a movement”—very similar to what the Love It/Hate It campaign had done long before the Internet blew open its potential reach. “It created a movement behind a heritage brand that was timeless—it wouldn’t matter when you asked the question,” he says.

“What we realized is that our lovers are extremely and obscenely passionate about the brand and the experience,” Denyard says. And as for relinquishing control of the marketing to the fan base (both those that love and hate Marmite), Denyard says: “The great, unsaid secret is that’s happening anyway—whether you like it or not.”

> FRESH AND VARIED PERSPECTIVE

Denyard’s tenure on the Marmite brand is only about seven months, but his five-and-a-half years at Unilever have given him great perspective on the consumer-packaged-goods industry and the power of marketing and packaging.

He participated in Unilever’s graduate training program, a two-year program channeling people through the organization’s sales, marketing and category management departments. Having then spent a number of years in sales, Denyard says he has a slightly more diverse perspective on the power of packaging.

“It’s very easy in marketing to get sucked into the creative,” he says. “And while it’s very important, translating it into something meaningful is quite an art. And packaging is a really important component of that, so that all the great thinking comes together at a single point on the shelf.”

“I’m still a bit of a salesman,” he concedes. “I love the physical, tangible thing that’s on the shelf and makes the sale.”

Thinking outside the “four walls of our business” is where the real work starts, Denyard says, leading the “happy relationship” that exists between marketing, design and packaging at Unilever.

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—Tom Denyard

Denyard says he and his team can be “bold and ballsy” because of this copasetic relationship, and also thanks to the brand’s long-time agency The Core. And working intimately with the lovers of the brand for so long has given the team just the courage it needed to push traditional marketing limits. “You need to be quite brave in believing you can smash through some glass ceilings—take the risk and have the confidence,” he says.

But does this approach reflect Denyard himself?

“I describe myself as prepared to be bold and daring,” he says. “It’s not at the core of my person, but, presented with the opportunity, you have to be prepared to be bold.” **BP**