

Oral History Interview

with

JOHN CORBANI

December 27, 1984

at

San Francisco, CA

By Scott Ellsworth

For the "Pepsi Generation" Oral History Project

Archives Center

National Museum of American History

Smithsonian Institution

TAPE ABSTRACT AND INDEX

Corbani, John San Francisco, California, December 27, 1984.
Interviewed by Scott Ellsworth.

A member of BBDO's Pepsi account team, John Corbani worked as an associate until 1961 before becoming research director for the domestic company. He became the Pepsi-Cola brand manager in about 1965, and was later made vice president of advertising. In 1974 he moved to the international division, where he served until 1981. At the time of the interview, Mr Corbani was with the Del Monte Corporation.

The major subjects addressed in the interview are: Jim Somerall's tenure as Pepsi president; the origins of the "Taste That Beats The Other's Cold--Pepsi Pours It On" campaign; the "Big As All America" campaign idea; and the aborted "Smilin' Majority" campaign. Other topics include: the ascendancy of Don Kendall, and his role in Pepsi advertising; the "One World" concept; Bill Durkee; Herbert Barnet; Phil Hinerfeld; John Bergin; the effect of the merger with Frito-Lay on Pepsi's marketing abilities; the lack of women executives at Pepsi; blacks and asians in Pepsi advertising; BBDO's ability to retain the Pepsi account; and Joan Crawford's role in Pepsi advertising.

The interview was conducted in Mr. Corbani's office in San Francisco.

Abstract of interview with John Corbani San Francisco December 27, 1984
Interviewer: Scott Ellsworth

Tape 1, Side 1

:35

CORBANI'S CAREER BACKGROUND

Before joining Pepsi in 1961, Corbani worked for Batten, Barton, Durstine, and Osborn (BBDO) for about five years. The last two years at BBDO he worked in market research on the Pepsi account. In December, 1961, he began work at Pepsi-Cola as an associate research director in the domestic company. An increase in the price of concentrate turned the bottlers against Herb Barnet and forced him out. In 1963, Don Kendall became the chief executive officer of Pepsi, and fostered a "one world" concept. Corbani was made director of new product development for Teem and Patio. In about 1965, he became Pepsi-Cola brand manager, then vice president of advertising. He joined the international division as vice president in charge of marketing and marketing services where he served from 1974 until 1981, when he joined the Del Monte Corporation.

7:20

JIM SOMERALL

When Kendall became chief executive officer, Jim Somerall joined the parent company and became its president. Corbani had met Somerall while Somerall was a bottler in Cincinnati. The "one world" concept helped Kendall take control of the company, and aided him in putting his people in charge of the consolidated domestic and international operations.

10:35

BILL DURKEE LEAVES

Durkee was aligned with Herb Barnet. Although he was not as "tainted" with the concentrate rise as Barnet was, that controversy affected him.

11:55

A FEW STEELE/BARNET MEN STAY

Phil Hinerfeld stayed at Pepsi because he had a great understanding of advertising. He also was widely respected professionally and personally. Alan Pottasch got along very well with Hinerfeld. John Bergin, who was in Corbani's estimate a near genius, remained on the account at BBDO. Bergin worked very well with clients and was an excellent copywriter.

15:05

ORIGINS OF "TASTE THAT BEATS THE OTHERS COLD"

Alan Pottasch was in Japan at that time. Sid Maran was in charge of advertising for Somerall. Somerall chose this "product driven - product hero" campaign, since he was a bottler-oriented executive. He knew the product and felt it was king.

19:15

TASTE TESTING

In developing this campaign, top Pepsi executives wanted to find out where Pepsi stood in relation to Coca-Cola in consumer taste preference. (This was the precursor to the "Pepsi Challenge"). They did so by having the agency conduct competitive taste tests on its own personnel. In the initial tests, Pepsi came out marginally ahead of Coke--but the results proved suspect due to problems with temperature control. They cooled both products and performed the test again. Pepsi won. They conducted taste tests on consumers and determined that people preferred Pepsi over Coke at cold temperatures. A result of this research was "Taste That Beats The Others Cold-Pepsi Pours It On."

24:50

PEPSI-COLA NOT AS POLISHED IN MARKETING

The Pepsi-Cola Company, like many other companies at that time, was not strong in marketing. When Pepsi merged with Frito-Lay, the company's skills in marketing improved immensely.

27:25

TESTING OF SLOGANS

They took four or five lines out to test the concepts with consumers, and "Taste That Beats The Others Cold" came out on top. This was the first time the word Coke entered into the advertising, and the first time Pepsi made a claim that it was superior to Coke.

Tape 1, Side 2

:30

DONALD KENDALL'S ROLE IN ADVERTISING

Kendall was always the "keeper of the advertising." Corbani was present when Kendall was first presented

the "Taste" campaign. MARCOM [Marketing Committee] signed off on the campaign after Somerall. Kendall saw the campaign for the first time only after production money had been spent. The same thing happened with the "You've Got A lot To Live - Pepsi's Got A lot To Give" campaign.

5:05

BACKGROUND OF "YOU'VE GOT ALOT TO LIVE - PEPSI'S GOT ALOT TO GIVE" CAMPAIGN

The bottlers have to be fully supportive of the advertising.

6:30

"BIG AS ALL AMERICA" CAMPAIGN IDEA

During the 1960s, before the "Live/Give" campaign, Corbani helped develop an idea for a "Big As All America" campaign. This campaign's objective was to say something good about the product and to include in it a bit of Americana as well. When the major presentation with storyboards took place Corbani felt the company was not right, even though consumer testing had turned out well. The campaign was rejected.

11:15

BBDO HAD TO FIND NEW CAMPAIGN

Within about four weeks, BBDO had to come up with a new campaign. "You've Got A lot To Live - Pepsi's Got A lot to Give" was one of the ideas. The campaign was meant to "tug on the heartstrings" and was directed at the youth of America. They sent two film crews across America to shoot footage for this campaign.

17:45

SMILIN' MAJORITY

Corbani worked on the "Smilin' Majority" campaign. John Bergin wrote the line. They were looking for an "up" campaign. They settled on "The Smilin' Majority," but later had to change it. Corbani was very hesitant in using this line because it was so close to Richard Nixon's slogan, "The Silent Majority." The campaign idea was endorsed by the president of Pepsi and by MARCOM. Norman Sisisky, an important bottler, loved it. They then showed it to a group of bottler's wives, who were totally opposed to it. The idea was subsequently dropped.

27:55

FEMALE EXECUTIVES

Discusses why there no women executives at Pepsi.

Tape 2, Side 1

:40

BLACKS

In domestic market they did have blacks in the ads; in international commercials they did all black commercials for specific markets like Jamaica. Roughly the same situation applied to asians.

2:15

BBDO

BBDO was in danger at different times of losing allied brand accounts, but not the mother product, Pepsi-Cola.

4:30

JOAN CRAWFORD'S ROLE AT PEPSI

In the 1950s the major goal of the campaign was to get Pepsi out of the kitchen into the living room. Joan Crawford's role diminished when Don Kendall took over the company.

REFLECTIONS ON SOME RECENT CAMPAIGNS

"Pepsi People - Feelin' Free" in retrospect was not a very good campaign.

"Come Alive, You're In the Pepsi Generation" and "Now It's Pepsi For Those Who Think Young" were the high water marks of Pepsi-Cola advertising. The campaign idea "Live/Give" was a good idea as well the "Pepsi Challenge."

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