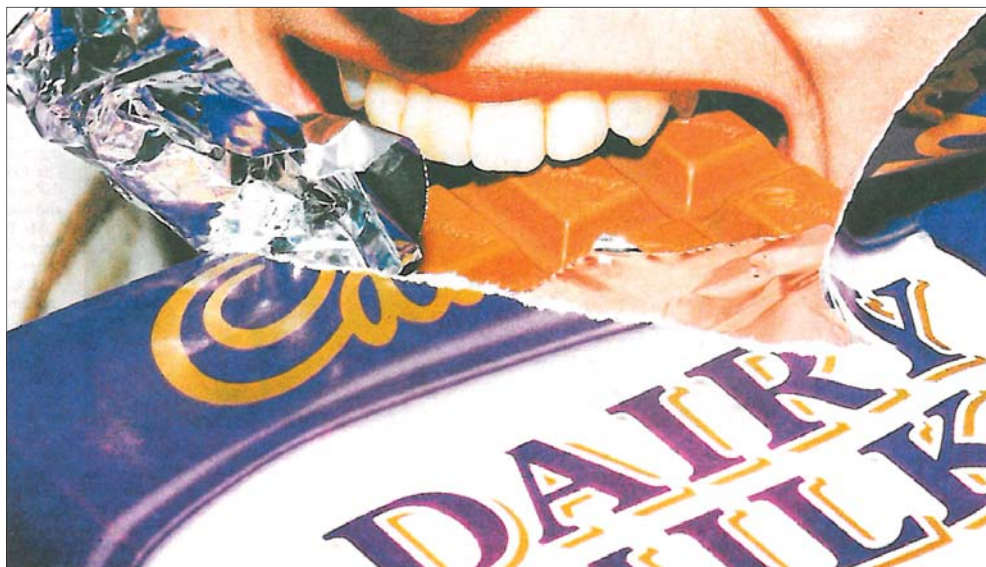


Money and marketing

Power has gone back to the people in product branding thanks to social media



ONCE BITTEN:
Cadbury got the message from consumers about palm oil.



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The world of marketing is changing at breakneck speed. Historically, marketers have had control of the presentation, position and perception of their products. Traditional media such as television, radio and print have been a one way communication channel for the marketer's view.

Unfortunately, some marketers are less than straight-up in their advertising campaigns - it's not that difficult to present facts in a manipulated way in order to suit a particular point of interest.

Cadbury recently encountered a barrage of consumer resistance when it changed its popular chocolate recipe by replacing some cocoa with palm oil in the interest of profit margins. As consumers, our typical response would have been to change our brand choice or put up with the new recipe. Either way we had no direct way of influencing a product decision like this.

However, the explosion of social media tools such as blogs, Twitter, FaceBook, MySpace and others has shifted the power and voice from the brand owner across to the

consumer. The online backlash to Cadbury's recipe change was swift, vocal and punitive.

Consumer websites, blogs and forums were buzzing with sharp criticism and Twitter was running hot with negative comment. It didn't take long for Cadbury to realize the extent of its miscalculation and announce a return to the original recipe. Now Cadbury even has an apologetic CEO fronting a TV campaign, promising free chocolate bars across the country.

At no time in our economic history has the consumer had so much influence over the outcome of brands. Through the networking power of social media, the ultimate control of product brands has irreversibly shifted across from marketer to consumer.

For many it's a power shift that will be hard to come to terms with, especially if you are the brand owner or marketer. The fact is that social media is here to stay and businesses have to be aware of and track what's being said about their product online, or face the consequences.

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