

Cussons



IMPERIAL LEATHER

THE MARKET

Soap products in Australia have traditionally been in bar form and that category is still by far the largest. It accounts for \$124 million of the \$175 million spent by consumers on personal cleansing products.

Within the bar soap segment, however, is a category of skin care bars that mix soap and 'synthetic soap'. These products, by their very nature, allow the manufacturer to vary the ingredients more than traditional soap formulae. Soapmakers can use these blends to include, for example, more moisturisers.

Commonly called 'combis' among soapmakers they make up a growing \$16 million of the bar soaps' \$124 million and are seen by many as the soaps of the future.

The capacity to include more moisturising agents in their formulations has also allowed soapmakers to branch into two more fast growing categories: shower gel or body wash and liquid hand soap, often complete with pump dispenser. Not having to solidify the formula allows the soapmaker much more freedom in selection of ingredients. The hand liquid category accounts for some \$23 million of the total personal cleansing market and the faster growing bodywash segment some \$13 million.

Imperial Leather is represented in both the new combi bar and bodywash categories by the Imperial Leather Extra Care range of products.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The Imperial Leather brand is the flagship of the Cussons range in Australia as it is in every other country that sells Cussons products. Imperial Leather is a market leading brand in male toiletries and is represented in anti-perspirant deodorants in both aerosol and roll-on format.



While there are other Cussons products that have much larger sales than Imperial Leather in Australia it is the Imperial Leather brand personality and product quality that has allowed them, through the Cussons family name, to thrive and prosper. From the Imperial Leather brand came the assurance of meticulous attention to product perfection, of product value in the quality definition of the word. The brand image gave people the certainty that a Cussons product in another field would perform as well as the bar did in the soap market.

For example the dishwashing liquid Morning Fresh, which is part of the Cussons stable, has been able to dominate a totally different market so completely that today it receives one-third of every dollar spent in its sector.

Imperial Leather has been the root from which all other Cussons products have grown.

HISTORY

The famous soap brand Imperial Leather was born in the late 1930s in England. But its genesis goes much further to a fragrance, probably from Tsarist Russia, which wafted its way across Europe, under various names and with subtle changes, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This scent finished up in a London fragrance house known as Baileys, which provided perfumes to royalty throughout Europe.

Baileys called their new perfume Russian Leather in honour of its origin. The Cussons family purchased Baileys in the early 1930s. Soon afterwards the brothers Cussons, Lesley and Alex, put formula and fragrance together and created Imperial Leather.

In Britain, the soap was largely put aside

until the 1939-45 war was over. But by the late forties and early fifties it was eagerly sought after, and by the mid fifties importers in scores of countries were sending hopeful orders to the Cussons family.

By 1970 Imperial Leather could be purchased in over 140 countries. In Australia, post war immigrants from Britain asked for the brand so frequently that it was imported for limited pharmacy distribution as early as 1954. But the Cussons Australia company was not formally set up until the late 1950s and the first employees were not engaged until 1961.

For the next ten years the product was sold here only through pharmacies, though distribution soon grew, thanks to the work of Cussons' own sales force - which at the time comprised two people, plus the half-time efforts of the managing director.

In 1968 and 1969 a member of the Cussons family and a director of the company, Hugh Goodwin, engaged a research company in Sydney (where the Cussons head office was located) to estimate the potential of a launch of Imperial Leather soap into the Australian grocery trade. The researcher recommended going ahead, and positioning the brand as a 'prestige pure' soap.

Still fully imported, Imperial Leather was sold into the grocery trade in January/February 1971 and first advertised on national television in April. It found immediate acceptance at a market share of around 3.5% of all soap by value. This was considered a success given that each single bar cost each buyer 22 or 23 cents. Most soaps at that time were packed in twos and each twinpack sold for around the price of one bar of Imperial Leather. Some brands were very much cheaper still.

Occasionally over the next nine years, Imperial Leather reached 4.5% but its average share was just under the 4% level.

Over the period 1975/76 the Paterson Zochonis Corporation purchased Cussons internationally. As a result of this new impetus the Australian company acquired Preserve Soaps of Richmond, Victoria. This gave the Australian organisation a manufacturing facility for soap. Locally produced Imperial Leather, still made precisely to the original formula, could be sold at substantially reduced price.

In the late seventies the head office of Cussons in Australasia moved from Sydney to Melbourne, and in 1980 Australian made Imperial Leather was launched. Now the tables were turned on the other market players. Cussons was the first soapmaker to sell soap in fourpacks, sixpacks, eightpacks, even tens. Once consumers could buy it at the same price as other top brands (and in the eight and tenpacks for much less) they jumped at it, and in no time it was Australia's favourite soap. So it remains today.

In the year ended April 1997, Imperial Leather bar soap (including the new partly synthetic variant) sold 2,330,000 kilograms of product compared to the next best selling brand's 1,644,700. The value of the brand's bar soap products alone for the



same period was more than \$16 million dollars at retail prices.

THE PRODUCT

When first produced and for many years afterward Imperial Leather was only made in the famous ivory colour. This and the famous fragrance that appealed to both sexes gave the brand a 'masculine skew' in its brand personality. The combination of formula 'hardness', colour and fragrance gave the product a level of sheer class that has never been enjoyed by any other brand in the soap markets of the world. Opening a pack of Imperial Leather has been described as 'like getting into a new car for the first time'.

The ivory soap remains by far the biggest seller today. It was joined by a pink variant in the early eighties and a white bar in 1994. A second white bar arrived with the combi extra skin care formula of 1996.

On all variants, the Imperial Leather label remains a vital element providing not only the brand's imprimatur of quality but a practical component that extends even further the product's natural formula based ability to last longer than competitive brands.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Imperial Leather has been extended into liquid bodywashes and skin care cleansing bars via the 'Extra Care' sub-brand in August 1996. Both products are clearly positioned for female use under a moisturising proposition.

This has effectively broadened the brand's appeal to a younger user profile and has enhanced the brand's feminine values.

The bodywash product has been supported with a television commercial that builds on the brand's core value of affordable luxury in a very pampering, feminine way.

The core soap brand presentation is currently being upgraded with new pack graphics incorporating a new brand logo. The objective is to keep the 'heart' of the brand healthy by giving the brand a fresher and more contemporary presentation.

PROMOTION

In the early days when Imperial Leather was confined to pharmacy distribution advertising was limited to women's magazines' colour pages. The illustrations were generally of mother and daughter over a headline such as 'For you who

care and the family you care for'. Most advertising stayed with mothers and daughters to temper the known masculine 'skew' of the brand image in a market dominated by female buyers.

For the grocery launch of 1971 a new approach was deemed necessary. As the market niche was 'prestige purity' one commercial featured a bride, another a baby, another a dove. The music, recorded by the full Sydney Symphony Orchestra, was semi-classical with a touch of Beatles thrown in. The bride advertisement won several creative awards.

In the mid seventies Australia borrowed the famous airplane commercial that had been so successful in the UK. Under legislation that then applied, however, the commercial had to be reproduced locally. So the Financial Times which the husband was reading became the Australian Financial Review and the destination became Tahiti instead of Bermuda. "Tahiti looks nice. Simon - Tahiti" became part of the language. Locally created and produced follow-ups won more creative awards.

Cussons decided to address the need for greater feminine direction with the arrival of the white variant in 1994. The family was now invisible. A young woman dived into a bar of white Imperial Leather which turned out to be liquid and full of creamy emollients in which she swam, as an Imperial Leather label floated over the surface. The music was light classical, composed especially for this one commercial. Research showed that this was one commercial that women loved to watch.

The actual arrival of combis required something totally new. For the bodywash a luxurious 'shower experience' advertisement was created, showing a woman outrageously pampered by Cussons products.

BRAND VALUES

The brand image retains a definite masculine skew which has been a strength in the past because it suggests authority, but now is beginning to move towards femininity. The brand retains its English flavour, but is becoming increasingly international. It carries with it a sense of conservatism, of being 'establishment' - but now with a new note of innovation. Imperial Leather is formal, understated and pure.

The launches of Extra Care bodywashes and bars and the accompanying commercials



have made the brand a little more feminine, but it will take some time before the brand loses its masculine bias altogether.

Indeed, it is likely that this will be a part of the brand's make-up for as long as the original ivory soap bar exists.

Things you didn't know about Imperial Leather

- When the product was first produced in England and for some years afterwards each bar of Imperial Leather was hand-polished to give it added smoothness.
- The distinctive fragrance of Imperial Leather probably originated in Tsarist Russia 100 years ago or more, and when it was first manufactured in London the soap was originally called Russian Leather.
- It is said that the idea of fitting a bathroom in an aircraft - as featured in Imperial Leather's most famous commercial - came from a news item about extra bathroom facilities installed in AIR FORCE ONE by President Richard Nixon.
- The Australian Cussons commercial featuring an opulent half submarine dwelling was written and produced by artist Ken Done, creative director at Cussons' Australian advertising agency in the early eighties. The advertisement used giant plastic bags containing water and over 1200 fish were employed: only 17 deaths were reported and some of these were apparently taken home for dinner by the production crew.
- The robot seen in this commercial was later used in several Cussons sales presentations. While waiting for his entrance at one Brisbane presentation he disappeared. Repeated enquiries to the police finally produced the comment that he had last been seen "walking down Ocean Road looking for his home."
- The 'baby' commercial produced to launch Imperial Leather into the Australian grocery market in 1971 was shot in Brisbane Town Hall and featured Australia's first full frontal male nude. He was ten months old.
- The 'bride' commercial, of the same vintage, was shot in the State Theatre, Market Street, Sydney at the foot of that theatre's famous marble staircase.

