

SPECIAL REPORT  
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# BRANDWEEK

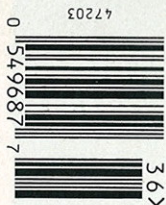
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Grand Marketer of the Year

# ENGLAND SCORES!

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Who says beer is dead? MillerCoors CMO Andy England injected some life—and sales—into Coors.

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**“The old Herbal Essences was about dried twigs and bark. Customers have evolved. Natural now means juicy, alive and luscious.”**



# Nature Boy

Herbal Essences debuted before Chris Keith was born, but a younger take on its natural ingredients was exactly what the brand needed.

**ONE AFTERNOON, MICHAEL JUTT,** PROCTER & GAMBLE'S assistant director of haircare, was sitting in his office when the phone rang. Jutt picked it up. It was Christopher Keith, over in marketing. "Mike," Keith barked. "We need your help. Do you guys know how to delight young women?"

Jutt couldn't tell if Keith was toying with him or not, so he played it straight. "Chris," he said, "I work in R&D. I'm a geek. I have no *clue* how to delight young women."

Jutt couldn't be blamed for being honest. (He deserved some points for modesty, too.) But Keith wasn't joking. In fact, Jutt later recalled, Keith was not just looking for a way to delight young women, "He wanted a formula," Jutt said.

Alas, if only P&G could bottle *that*, there would be no need to be in the shampoo business. But Keith was after a concoction that was as close as R&D could give him. And that was just the start of what he needed. After all, Keith, 34, was the assistant marketing director of a brand that hadn't delighted anyone in a long time.

P&G had purchased the Herbal Essences haircare line from Bristol-Myers Squibb in 2001. Now, four years later, nobody had touched it and the brand was gathering both proverbial and literal dust on store shelves. Keith was convinced that rejuvenating Herbal Essences meant answering one question: What turns Gen Y women on?

Keith certainly knew what turned them off. Since 1994, Herbal Essences' ad campaign had featured a woman in the shower with her hair soaped up shouting a moaning retort of "Yes! Yesss!" The tagline was, "Totally organic," and the phonetic baby step from organic to orgasmic wasn't lost on anyone.

Too bad the point was. Times had changed. "Organic" might have been a head turner at one time, but now almost every brand was using it. Plus, P&G wanted Herbal Essences' appeal to skew young, and while 11-to-24-year-old boys might think simulated shower orgasms were funny, girls did not.

Fortunately, Keith was armed with the results of research P&G had done on the target demo. Since his overall goal was to return to the branding roots of Herbal Essences, which had begun life in the 1970s as a shampoo made with herbs and botanicals, the new



**Color my world:** Vivid hues and curvaceous bottles defined the new Herbal Essences.

watchword was "natural." Research showed it was important to Gen Y women, but their idea of it had changed since the days of clogs and feathered haircuts. It had even changed since Herbal Essences' previous owners' attempts at marketing the brand, which had taken the form of Britney Spears and a supporting cast of vixens assuring viewers they had the "urge to herbal." Clearly, Keith had his work cut out for him.

## Getting Wet in the Field

According to his colleagues, Keith understood that remaking the brand meant getting groundbreaking work from every department associated with it. Given a company of P&G's size, Keith also recognized the importance of encouraging everybody to express his or her individuality, which is why he convened an initial staff meeting and had all in attendance do an improv routine. "A room full of 40 people making funny noises, screaming and jumping up and down is not the normal thing," recalled senior manager of haircare David Graves. "But Chris has never been one to shy from that. It built strong relationships."

The knowledge required to revamp Herbal Essences required far more than consumer questionnaires. So Keith and 15 of his colleagues became embedded marketers—ethnographers—meeting with young study participants in their natural retail habi-

By Elaine Wong  
Photo by Peter J. Coe



**Go soak your head:** New ads stressed hydration, with a little help from some cherubs.

tats (the mall) and observing natural behavior (watching TV). “Chris went to a Nordstrom with a girl once and I remember him holding up all the clothes and T-shirts she had bought and discussing why she had purchased them,” Graves recalled. “We wanted [Herbal Essences] to be as cool as the products they buy at, say, Sephora. We wanted to be a fashion statement, an icon.”

In June 2006, the new Herbal Essences line rolled into stores nationwide and the change was apparent immediately.

Gone was the clear-plastic container with the workaday label. The new Herbal Essences appeared in curvaceous bottles whose colors would give the Pantone color chart a run for its money. Each variety featured a line of shampoo, conditioner and other formulation, like split-end protector, in bottles correspondingly curved to allow them to stand together and “fit” like puzzle pieces. Each new vivid color supported its corresponding beauty claim: For example, aqua blue for the hydrating formula and electric-green for the deep-cleansing batch.

Keith saw particular marketing potential in the names on the bottle. With a liberal use of double-entendres (plus a neck-deep indulgence in puns), the new Herbal Essences broke with the practice of merely adding drippy adjectives to a name and took serious creative risks, in some cases crafting phrases that sound more like alternative bands than a kind of shampoo. There’s “Dangerously Straight” for the curl-reducing formula, “Ain’t No Flaking Way” to get rid of dandruff, “Long Term Relationship” for long hair and “Break’s Over” to repair split ends.

“We developed unique and differentiated naming because it was consistent with our overall strategy of making the haircare experience much more fun,” Keith explained. P&G ran variations of the names across consumer focus groups until it felt it had the colloquial groove just right.

But, according to analyst John Faucher of J.P. Morgan (which has an investment-banking relationship with P&G), the names are more than just cute. “What you see here is specialization,” he said. “This is what consumers are looking for in haircare. It’s a case of real tangible brand benefits, with ads to communicate those benefits.”

### Watching the Soaps

The changes weren’t just on the shelves. Working with Atelier, New York, Herbal Essences began airing new spots in 2007 that, in their themes of storybook mysticism, couldn’t be further from a woman yelling “Yes!” in her bathroom shower. Case in point: The spot for “Hello

Hydration” zooms inside the Herbal Essences logo to find a woman riding a camel in the desert before stumbling on an oasis. Desert goddesses emerge from coconut trees and an aquamarine pool to shower her with sparkling coconut milk and orchid juices until water pours forth from her previously parched hair. The feeling of intense hydration, Keith explained, was exactly what the brand was going for.

“We quickly learned that natural and environmental are still relevant,” he said. “But the way we were doing it before was in the old Herbal Essences. It was about dried twigs and bark and herbs and it felt dead because it was. Customers have evolved. Natural, to them, meant juicy, alive and luscious.”

Print ads were built on the same theme. One shows a woman luxuriating in the company of three cherubs pouring fountains of Herbal Essences down her long hair.

Despite the fact that the commercial spots of an orgasmic woman in the shower have been much parodied, Keith has reclaimed that imagery instead of trying to ignore it, as a less confident marketer might have done. The “Hello Hydration” ad features the woman bathing in the oasis (along with a muscular man riding a sea horse) and the spot closes with a shot of the shampoo bottle perched on the rim of a shower. It’s a subtle cue, but the reference works even if viewers never saw the old spots. “A lot of women tell us that the only moment they have for themselves is the shower,” Keith related. “It’s personal time and we try to bring a bit of that to our advertising.”

Part of this escapism lies in the brand’s focus on the importance of scent, an aspect Clairol first recognized when it owned the product and which P&G took to heart. “For most haircare brands at the time, fragrance was a bit of an afterthought,” Keith said. “To come and do fragrance in a way that consumers loved was breakthrough,” he said of Clairol’s marketing efforts.

So far, the work of Keith and his creative team seems to be paying off. Herbal Essences was named one of the top 10 nonfood brands for the 2006-07 year, according to IRI’s March 2008 *New Product Pacesetters* report. The brand, which earned \$154 million in sales, topped L’Oréal’s Vive Pro Hair Care (\$83 million) for second place. Kimberly-Clark’s Huggies Supreme Natural Fit claimed first place with \$171 million. (Figures do not include Wal-Mart purchases.) After nearly a decade of decline, Herbal Essences is growing again.

“We learned a tough lesson years ago: When you neglect a brand, you lose your way,” Keith said. “We don’t intend to ever learn that lesson again.” In doing so, Keith and the R&D department also picked up another thing or two: They figured out how to delight young women, after all. BW

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