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Sara Lee Chief Marketing Officer Philippe Schaillee

By Jane Schneider

If you've been wondering what Sara Lee's been doing to promote their Jimmy Dean's D-Light meat products, you need only Google the name to discover a host of references on mom-friendly blogs. In a marketing campaign that relied in part, on social networking to build a more personal connection to their brand, the food and beverage giant got women talking about — and trying — their new D-Light sandwich products by hosting an online contest.

It was a clever way to go directly to consumers and tie healthy eating and wellness to sausage (albeit turkey sausage), a product that doesn't generally make the top 10 list of healthy food choices. The company's aim was to raise awareness around their new low-fat products — and what better way than by having moms write about feeding the sandwiches to their husbands and kids — families chowing down on Jimmy Dean's answer to the Egg McMuffin. D-lightful, said their marketers gleefully.

Under the leadership of Chief Marketing Officer Philippe Schaillee, Sara Lee is spending 25 percent of its advertising budget in online buys. Not television or print advertising — online. It is the way of the future of marketing, reports Schaillee.

The Belgian-born Schaillee shared his thoughts on marketing in the digital age at the final Economic Club meeting May 5<sup>th</sup>, held at the University Club. Also in attendance were Belgian consulate members with a party from the Memphis in May organization. The dignitaries were in town for the city's annual Memphis in May celebration, which saluted the country of Belgium.

During his 17 years with corporate giant Sara Lee, whose stable of food and beverage brands include Ball Park, Douwe Egberts, Hillshire Farm, Jimmy Dean, Sara Lee, and Senseo coffee, Schaillee has honed his skills in understanding brands and Internet marketing strategy.

He opened his remarks by talking about the changing landscape and how his company has worked hard to understand consumer needs. What their research has borne out, he notes, is that regardless of nationality, consumer needs are global. For example, when it comes to coffee consumption, "People drink coffee differently in different countries," he allows, "but their needs are the same: they drink coffee to get energy or use it to bring people together."

He then moved on to discuss the rise of digital devices. The proliferation of smart phones and hand-held devices is increasingly shaping the way people receive information from the Internet. And it's making that information available to people whenever they want it, 24/7. What does that mean to business leaders intent on selling their products to consumers?

“Since consumers can be in contact with content while on-the-go, it means you as a company must adapt your message. Mass media won't work; it must be adapted to better need the consumer's needs.

“Technology is enabling a different experience with the consumer. Companies can interact and know consumers; we didn't have that kind of engagement earlier. Now, consumers can shape opinion,” he said. If consumers can shape opinion, the thinking goes, then that opinion can ultimately translate into sales.

The creation of the Better Breakfast, Better You campaign is a good example of how Sara Lee tapped into that shifting paradigm. Sara Lee hooked up with BlogHer, a mom blog aggregator, to launch their sweepstakes contest at the end of December 2010. They asked 25 mom bloggers to talk about their New Year's resolutions with a mention of Jimmy Dean's D-Light breakfast sandwich and the company's URL. (Each blog also mentioned the post being a compensated review from BlogHer and Jimmy Dean.) To enter the sweepstakes, blog readers were asked to blog, tweet, or respond to the blog post. In doing so, they would be entered into a drawing from that blogger's site for a \$100 VISA gift card.

What Sara Lee received was significant product endorsement, often complete with photos of happy parents eating their product — the kind of unvarnished advertising money can't buy; the kind of grassroots marketing companies can do when they know how to harness the increasingly powerful social media outlets that exist on the web.

Comment [d1]: I did and he said yes.

“What is the revolution here? The 'aha' is that the brand is no longer in charge, business is no longer in charge, content has been democratized and shifted from pushing information to listening and finding a need, then making content flexible and in real time, and to generate spirit, not just message. People are getting more participatory and personal with brands. That's liberating for business but it creates new standards and you must behave differently, you must earn the consumer's trust, make a shift from selling to giving,” he says.

“Create an experience that's beyond the traditional ad campaign to a true consumer experience. As a company, you must sense a response and react to opportunity because your brand is always on. Is the consumer giving you feedback that you can use? You must begin to better understand the consumer and what it is they want. Make your campaign relevant to your consumer's needs. Determine what needs your brand will meet, and then go talk to your consumer. You have the ability to talk one-on-one now versus before when you used focus groups.

“Also, be consistent in your communication because media is global. Sending different messages in different countries won't work because people will notice. Invest in listening and dialoguing in real time, because if you don't answer, someone else might, and you won't like that answer.”