

## **Emerson Direct Smoke Away Case Study**

### **Branding Smoke Away**

#### **Background:**

[Smoke Away](#) had enjoyed minimal success as an alternative smoking cessation product in an overly crowded marketplace. The challenge was to create a new campaign that embraced the customers desire to try something “other” than traditional smoking cessation products that often times contained nicotine.

#### **Executive Summary**

Emerson Direct has been one of the premier direct response marketers in the industry. When Emerson Direct decided to produce, market and sell Smoke Away, it was with the specific intent resurrect a brand by utilizing it’s diverse direct response marketing experience, leveraging its DRTV, Direct Mail and Internet Marketing experience to turn around a product which was lagging in branding, visibility and sales.

By incorporating best of breed direct response marketing practices, Emerson Direct was able to scale a product averaging less than a 1000 kits a month in sales to over a million kits currently sold to date. By quickly scaling the direct response endeavor from a comprehensive branding and direct mail initiative, Emerson Direct was able to build the Smoke Away brand into one of the most recognizable smoking cessation products on the market today.

#### **Rationale and Objective**

With the dearth of smoking cessation products that were on the market back in the late 90’s, there was a certainly a market potential to possibly give the consumer another choice. Having done extensive product and market analysis, Emerson Direct found that the timing might be right to give the smoking cessation market sector a shot.

Initially the objective was to test certain products among consumer focus groups. But rather than rely on the unpredictability of people who are sometimes not going to quit smoking regardless of the incentive or motivation, Emerson Direct decided to do test mailing of a nicotine free smoking cessation aid. Initially, the goal was to merely test certain copy, packaging, offers and formulas and combinations. Without testing, any direct response marketing campaign is going to be dead in the water. The agency of record can never assume that they automatically know what the consumer wants or is going to do.

Once the parameters were set as far as what was going to be the most effective, Emerson Direct was able to determine possible target audiences, regions, and specific demographics. Once those were set, it was now time to put into action a comprehensive direct response marketing campaign that would cover (1) Direct mail (2) Direct Response radio (3) DRTV-both long form and short form along with infomercials and (4) Internet Direct Response

### **What Was Delivered**

The first roll-out was Direct Mail with limited test quantities to begin with. What was discovered was that there was definitely an audience and a user group that was looking for an alternative. Perhaps they were all searching for the magic bullet, but nevertheless, the first returns exceeded the 2-3% expectations by a long shot and precipitated larger subsequent mailings.

Emerson Direct then decided to induce the customer mailings with further enhancements and product offerings and found a very willing and open customer. In tandem with this ramp up was the immediate decision to start running Direct Response based radio spots to certain market segments throughout the continental United States. These spots were generally 30 seconds in duration and ran in mostly overnight slots geared mostly towards AM radio listeners.

The response was immediate. With call centers set up with strategic partners, Emerson Direct was able to convert better than 25% of the inbound calls into orders. Furthermore, Emerson Direct was also building a comprehensive customer database that would further solidify its hold on marketing to the smoking cessation market segment.

With the success that Emerson Direct was enjoying not only in Direct Response Mailings and DRTV and radio the next aspect that needed to be ramped up was the technology side or internet based side of Internet Direct Response. By incorporating informational as well as transactional websites into the marketing mix Emerson Direct was able to leverage all aspects of the Direct Response Experience for a consumer based product.

Starting in the late 90's with zero market share and as little 100 kits a week. Emerson Direct was able to ramp to selling thousands of kits a week to becoming a known branded smoking cessation product, and becoming a retail success as well by subsequently being sold in some of the largest retail and drugstore chains in the country.

Though it did not happen overnight, Emerson Direct was able to take each and every aspect of direct response marketing and tailor it directly towards success for the company as well as success and overall consumer satisfaction for the discerning and oftentimes skeptical customer who is trying to quit smoking.

Yes some direct response elements outperformed others, but overall, it is safe to say that in the large scheme of things, as a marketer, it is foolish not to try all aspects of direct response marketing for the simple fact that in the end you are still branding and your are

still selling to people that would otherwise not know about your product. If they do not buy now, it does not mean that they will not buy the product at another time and place.

### **Communication Activity**

From the beginning, it was important that Emerson Direct established Smoke Away as another alternative to smoking cessation products that were currently available. It was also important in the marketing literature to establish Smoke Away as an herbal based-homeopathic based product that contained zero nicotine since our market research had indicated that a lot of current smokers that wanted to quit were not crazy about quitting smoking by using a nicotine based product.

One of the important aspects of creating channels of distribution for the Smoke Away campaign was to make sure that the communication with the customer were numerous plentiful, and readily available in many forms. If consumers were able to stay in touch with the makers of Smoke Away, then perhaps that would reduce the number of returns, complaints and skeptics, and most of all, smokers!

The first objective and actually the most important, was to create a simple return policy which stated that if you do not quit smoking within the first 30 days, then simply return the product for a full refund.

The second objective was to create a Knowledge Base and customer service ticket based response system so that customers could get an immediate answer to their question in 24 hours or less.

The third aspect was creating an extensive FAQ section on all Smoke Away based sites that answered and addressed any and all potential and current customer questions, this served 2 purposes. One it reduced the number on inbound customer service calls and two, it reduced the number of inbound customer service emails

Next, Emerson Direct created a Smoke Away Support Group bulletin board system online. With over 8,000 members at one point, this website serves and served as a way for new and old customers to talk about the challenges that all smokers face whether they were using Smoke Away or not. This site has evolved into something more than what it was originally planned for, but has actually done more to champion the cause not only of Smoke Away but also of people who simply want to quit smoking.

As the advent of Social media hit while Smoke Away was still trying to reach all markets and user types, Emerson Direct decided to roll out in quick succession a Smoke Away blog that currently provides current quit smoking news, tips, advice, statistics, videos and images all with the goal of getting someone to quit. This site has served more as a way for someone to do research and build up the courage and resolve to quit smoking than it has to promote that activity solely through the use of Smoke Away. This has had a tremendous impact in the stop smoking community as well as garnering respect from

others who may have thought or had a preconceived notion as to what Smoke Away was all about.

Emerson Direct realized that it was important to be out front in regards to being a leader in the fight against smoking addiction and the efforts of quitting smoking. To further the cause Emerson Direct has also created a Facebook Smoke Away user group as well as creating a Wiki on how to quit smoking with the help of Smoke Away. All of these social media tools have contributed not only to the branding efforts of Smoke Away but also contribute to the overall efforts of being a leader in the fight to help the world quit smoking.

### **Successes**

Emerson Direct enjoyed some immediate success that they can certainly address to the effect of a direct response product that reached a viral status very quickly. Sensing that there was a groundswell, Emerson Direct was able to move fast and was agile in its deployment of marketing vehicles charged with grabbing market share quickly.

Because of this Emerson Direct capitalized on a market ripe for a new product. Emerson Direct was able to then sustain that early success and turn it to a steady profit making business unit within the company. With over a million kits sold to date, it is easy to see that Emerson Direct was able to blend old school direct response marketing practices with some of the newer internet based web 2.0 technologies to sustain a healthy growth percentage year after year.

### **Lessons Learnt**

Because of the immediate and early success of Smoke Away, Emerson Direct learned some hard and very evident lessons about what can and cannot be said about a product when marketing and selling it. Emerson Direct in its zeal to move faster than is humanly possible over-stepped what can and can't be said to consumers and was subsequently penalized by the Federal Trade Commission. Emerson Direct agreed to pay a penalty and moved on. In business things like this happen and for some that is the end of the story. For others who have strong leadership, a solid product, and good customers and loyal employees, this is merely a hiccup. This has held true for Emerson Direct as it has now been almost 5 years since the FTC fine.

The most important lesson that all marketers could learn from something like this is. Be honest and forthcoming and if you make a mistake, you make a mistake. But ultimately stay true to your customers and treat them like gold. As is always said, your greatest sales people can be your greatest customer!

What was important for Emerson Direct as well was to become more transparent in what was done on a day to day basis. Because of this Emerson Direct decided to create other satellite sites to not only support Emerson Direct, but also to grow the Emerson Direct

brand. This included creating [Emerson Direct Marketing](#), [Emerson Direct Response](#) and creating one of the fastest growing blogs in the direct response marketing space, [Emerson Direct Marketing Observations](#). All of these efforts were in an effort to be more accessible to customers and clients.

## **What is in the Future**

Emerson Direct continues to produce and market and sell Smoke Away, not only nationally but also globally. Plans are in the works for new formulations, new logo and new packaging so as to accommodate the ever increasing influx of new smoking cessation products. But with over a million kits sold, all Smoke Away needs to really do is to continue to help in the battle against smoking addiction. The statistics bear out that there are still over 400,000 people dying each year from smoking related causes, so anything that Emerson Direct and Smoke Away can do to stem that number from growing, they will do.

## **Reference:**

[Emerson Direct Website](#)

[Emerson Direct Blogsite](#)

[Smoke Away](#)

[Smoke Away Support Site](#)

[Smoke Away Blog](#)

[Smoke Away Wiki](#)

[Facebook](#)