

HOW BEANO BECAME THE NEW SOCIAL CURRENCY FOR A NEW GENERATION

2018 Marketing Society Excellence Awards:

Brand Revitalisation



BEANO



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Executive Summary

This paper tells how a much-loved children's comic transformed itself from a dormant heritage brand into a contemporary entertainment brand for a whole new generation of digital-native kids.

Please note: highlighted content is not publishable due to confidentiality.

Objective

To relaunch Beano to a whole new generation of kids and parents in a time of declining print sales and rising digital opportunity. Specifically, to spark a huge increase in the Beano's online users from just [REDACTED] to [REDACTED] - the threshold for successful future monetisation.

Scale of the task

The rewards of traditional print publishing were declining, but the rewards of online success seemed very far out of reach. Beano's sister comic, the Dandy, launched a paid online edition that closed soon afterwards. Meanwhile Beano's own online presence hadn't tapped into the significant audience of kids online over several years. Even the Walt Disney Corporation, with all its vast resources, was unable to achieve sustainable commercial success with Club Penguin.

Campaign

Beano Studios partnered with communications agency Red Brick Road to redesign their digital offering and create a brand, and a message, to launch it. The result was a unique one-destination entertainment platform for kids, and a campaign driven by a simple yet powerful insight into the audience – which informed everything and even found its way back into the comic.

The insight was this: children are simultaneously both digital and binary. They are technologically-sophisticated, but have a deep-seated need for yes-no, good-bad answers that help them understand where they fit in the world.

The campaign was all about seeing the world through a kid's binary lens, summed up as So Beano! (awesome) or No Beano! (rubbish).

Results

Penetration leapt to over [REDACTED]. Awareness jumped from 50% to 75%¹. And even the Beano's traditional print sales went up, increasing by 10%.

¹Source: Panelbase survey kids aged 6 – 12,

January 2018 (519), March 2017 (516), May 2016 (556)

BEANO: A NATIONAL TREASURE

Published by DC Thomson, since July 1938 Beano is the UK's oldest, best-selling, most popular children's comic. It's been read by over 27 million living Brits, selling 2 million copies a week in its heyday.

Beano continued to stay at the top of its market, with a number one annual for 19 of the last 20 years.



Regardless of market share, media consumption was changing dramatically. It was a problem.

Since the late 1990s, the 'engine room' of the Beano brand, the comic, was suffering from the long-term decline in print media sales.

Various initiatives were developed to counter this – a TV show; a theme park tie-in; even a Royal Mail commemorative stamp. But there was no consistency and no overarching brand vision, no greater role in consumer's lives.

Little by little Beano was becoming a brand of the past.



Between 2012 and 2015 the brand found itself facing the convergence of three hugely significant events.

The first was a commercial bombshell. In 2012, the long-term decline in comic sales finally hit home when the Beano's sister comic, the Dandy, closed its doors.

The second event was a demographic cliff-edge. For decades, love of the Beano had been handed down from parent to child. But by the mid-2010s, the slow decline had reached a 'tipping-point' where a critical mass of parents had no longer been Beano readers in their own youth. There was nothing to pass on².

The third event was a technological milestone. The iPad was launched in 2010. From 2015 onwards a generation of 5+ kids had spent their whole lives in a world driven by tablets and other devices.

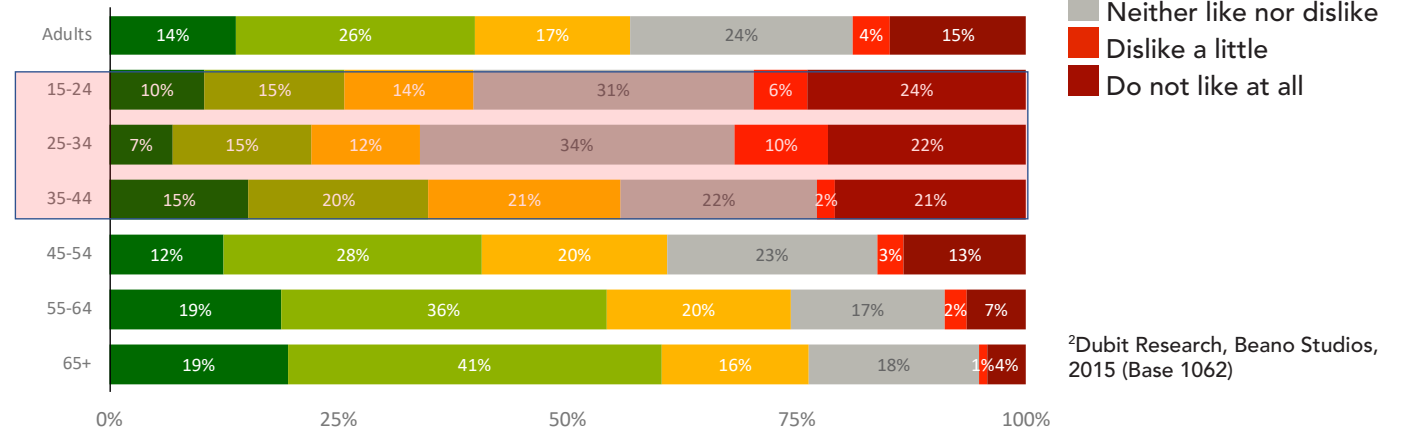
Meanwhile, parents were tearing their hair out trying to monitor usage – only 18% of parents felt the internet offered enough safe places for their kids³.



Combined, these added up to a seemingly unsolvable problem for Beano's traditional model - but also a huge opportunity with digital.

Brand affinity decreases with age

How do you feel about the Beano?



²Dubit Research, Beano Studios, 2015 (Base 1062)

²Dubit Research, Beano Studios, 2015 (Base 1062)

³Beano Panelbase Survey, May 2016, 500 parents of 6-12s, fieldwork 21st-26th April

Beano had to become a success in digital to reach a new generation of kids.

Beano realised succeeding in digital offered the only sustainable future for their brand.

But the precedents were not good. After closing as a print comic, The Dandy launched a paid online edition. It lasted 6 months.

Meanwhile, Beano already had a web presence, supporting the print comic. But it only attracted [redacted] users – less than 10% of print readership.

In 2015, DC Thomson tried a different approach.

They set up Beano Studios, a standalone company staffed by entertainment and digital specialists.

Their mission was to capture what made Beano a success and to transpose that onto the behaviours of digital-native children in the 21st century.

The birth of a partnership.

While the product offering was being developed by Beano studios, independent communications agency Red Brick Road (RBR) was commissioned to help create interest and desire amongst kids.

It wasn't an easy task: it was to bottle up the loved Beano spirit of comedy and rebellion into a creative platform that would completely redefine the brand's identity across all content and communications in a new, digital age.



The business objective.

To create a valuable digital brand capable of a critical mass of reach and attractiveness, in order to be successfully monetised at a subsequent stage - through advertising, sponsorship and branded content.

The marketing objective.

To achieve the business objective, marketing needed to increase monthly website users from just [redacted] to [redacted]

This was entry level for successful brand activity and advertising sales. In percentage terms, this meant an increase of over 1,300%. Only by achieving this hugely-ambitious target would Beano be able to trigger sufficient brand partnerships.

The communication objective.

In order to achieve such a huge increase in users and be that desirable brand partner, communications had to significantly increase brand awareness.

In 2016, kids' awareness had fallen to just 50%⁴ (c/w Lego and Disney at around 90%). And parents were measuring at 70%⁴. The target for both was an ongoing 5% increase YOY.

It also had to prompt reappraisal of the brand by driving its 'trustworthy' digital credentials to parents.

In 2016 this number was 56% - with a target as 60% in the first 18 months.



The Journey (1): creating a new kind of product.

Beano set out to get close to 6-12 year olds up and down the UK to determine what really makes them tick. They talked to children in schools. They talked to them in homes. They spoke to them singularly, and in groups. They spoke to pairs of best friends. They brought them together for workshops.

The output was to break away from existing models. Not an online comic, like the failed digital Dandy. Not an add-on to a print comic, like the current Beano.com support site. Not even a themed gaming site, like the Disney Corporation's failing Club Penguin.

Instead, build a hub for all of the hottest kid stuff out there (content, games, exercises) – focusing totally on 'the now', just like kids themselves. It would be updated constantly, every day and become the new social currency.

Importantly, it would reassure parents by being a safe place for kids and advertisers.

Now that the offering was clear, what it now needed was a smart way to bring children there.



The journey (2): looking for insights.

Beano knew what kids wanted from an entertainment point of view – but what was the sharp insight to shape the language in which they spoke to them?

Research needed to go deeper.

RBR interrogated existing research and identified some interesting hypotheses, which would be tested through a series of further depth interviews.

The agency identified one disarmingly simple insight.

A surprising truth about children. They're digital explorers – but they're also binary.

Children are digital natives. Their lives are technologically-enabled and technology-dependent in a way that is unprecedented in human history. Yet on another level they still have the same issues and needs as their parent,

their grandparents, their great-great-great-grandparents:

They want to know where they stand. They want to know where they fit. They want to know what to think, and say, and do, and what not to.

They have an almost insatiable appetite for wanting to know what's what, and what's not.

For all their technological sophistication they remain astonishingly binary. Just as we were, at their age. Just as their children will be.

The marketing opportunity

RBR realised that more than 'just' a content portal, Beano could be the brand that feeds their appetite for what is and what isn't, and what's in and what's out.



The campaign idea.
So Beano/No Beano.

RBR created a Beano world, and a campaign, in which things are either 'So Beano!' (totally epic and awesome) or 'No Beano!' (totally rubbish).

This wasn't just a one-off creative platform; it was a complete redefinition of the Beano brand identity – bottling up the spirit in a contemporary world. The key to execution was a 'show, don't tell' strategy that would attract new fans and reignite love from old ones.



A seamless campaign and product experience: bringing So Beano/No Beano to life.

Marketing and product teams worked together to deliver a seamless So Beano/No Beano experience.

The campaign used TV, print and digital advertising to entice kids to the new Beano.com with examples of what was So Beano and No Beano – an experience in itself, more engaging and traffic driving than simple messaging.

Upon arrival, they would experience a User Interface built specifically around the creative thought, allowing children to vote on all content. Content streams were created, one for epic wins (So Beano), the other for hilariously dismal failures (No Beano).

The comic created So Beano reader editors who could apply to be drawn and subsequently edit the comic (with a little guidance!) and a So Beano section dedicated to epic UGC photos.

The brand relaunch event invited children to vote on content and celebrities that were So Beano or No Beano – leading to a gunging for Kate Garraway!

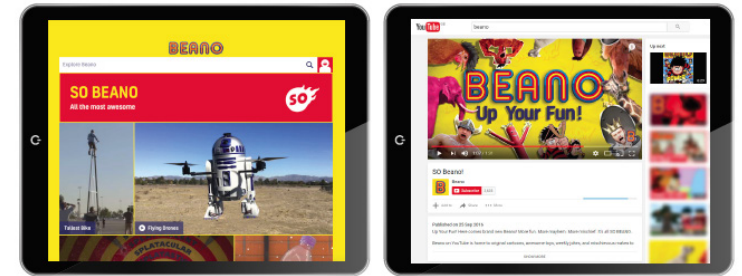


Further down the funnel, fans could enjoy endless content on social channels demonstrating So/No Beano moments, creating constant buzz and encouraging involvement from kids to provide their favourite examples. Last but not least, the print comic introduced a dedicated So/No Beano section, bridging the old with the new.

The campaign launched in October 2016.

Press

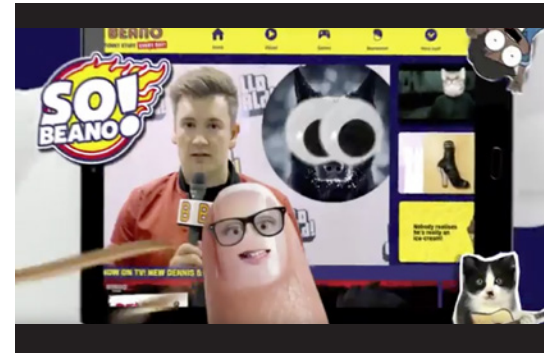
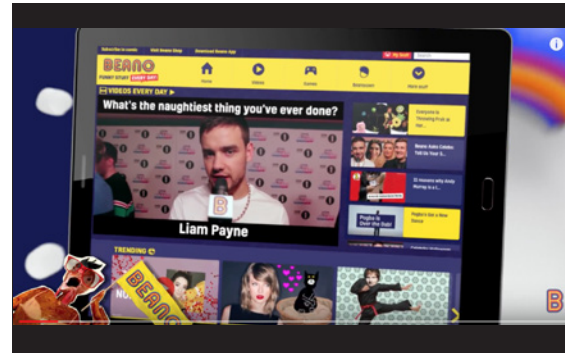
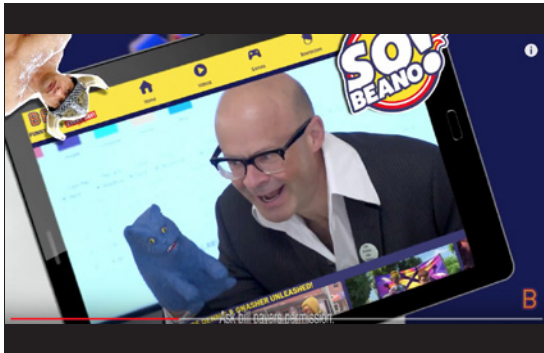
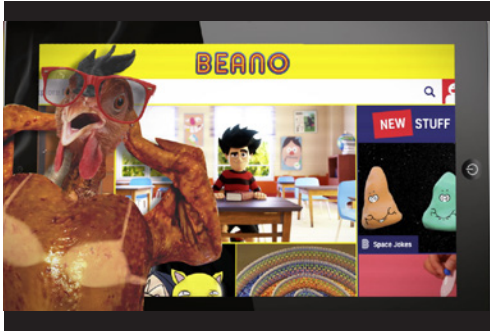
Digital



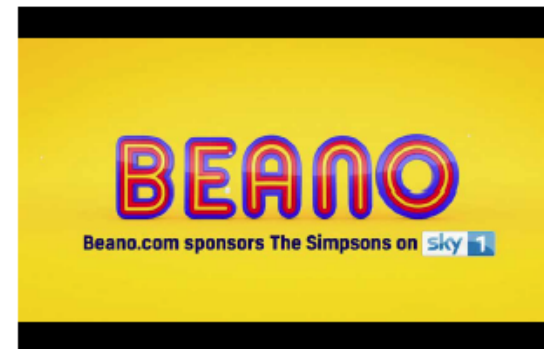
Social



VOD/TV



Sponsorship



The results: overview.

For its digital relaunch, the Beano needed to hit some extremely tough targets. Not only did it meet them all – it actually exceeded each and every one to a remarkable degree.

The results: Business.

The business objective was to create a digital property capable of reaching a critical mass of reach and attractiveness in order to then be successfully monetised at a subsequent stage. The astonishing usage and awareness increases, below, show just how successful the campaign has been in laying down those foundations for subsequent monetisation.

Although the business aim was focused on future partnerships, Beano has already achieved a significant financial boost as a result of the campaign: print comic sales (retail and subs) grew 10% in FY17, against a shrinking market (-8% year-on-year for primary boys' magazines).

The results: marketing.

Marketing needed to increase unique monthly users from just [redacted] to [redacted]

an extraordinarily ambitious increase of over 1,300%. In fact the results were even better: users actually rose to [redacted] – an astonishing growth of over FIFTEEN HUNDRED PERCENT.

Performance marketing delivered twice the target of users through highly efficient activity – an extended period of test and learn ultimately delivered users for 50% of the target CPA within 3 months of launch with campaigns topping 15% CTR on the SuperAwesome network, and delivering consistently high quality of users, whose dwell time was comparable with that of organic users.

The results: communication:

Communications need to significantly increase brand awareness above the existing 50%. An increase to 60% would have been good. 70% would have been great. In fact, awareness went up to 73% amongst 6-12s in 18 months, driven by an extraordinary first 6 months in which it jumped from 50% to 65%⁵.

The launch moment drove a social reach of 5.9m, Beano trended for the first time

in its 78yr existence and over £1m of PR value in coverage was delivered in 2 weeks after launch (ROI 10:1). The next 4 months yielded £2.5m in PR.

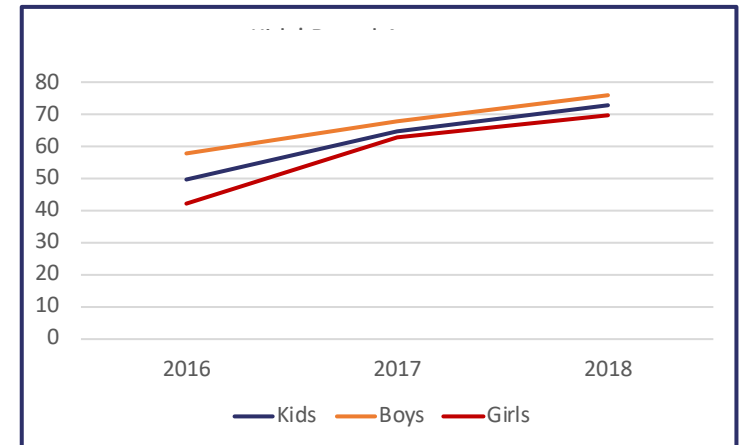
Parents loved it too – parental awareness soared from 70% - 91%⁵.

Meanwhile, trust scores rocketed. In 18 months, trust scores in Beano as a digital brand leapt from 56% to 74%⁵.

That outstripped the gigantic online gaming phenomena, Roblox and Minecraft. Critically, it was 100% ahead of parents' trust in YouTube (37%)⁵.

Kids' Brand Awareness

May 2016 to January 2018



Source: Panelbase survey kids aged 6 – 12, January 2018 (519), March 2017 (516), May 2016 (556)

What's happened since the initial campaign launch in October 2017?

ComScore research shows Beano is "the fastest growing UK kids' website between Dec 2016 and Dec 2017 – a growth of 562%"⁶.

Dennis and Gnasher had been present on TV for many years, but to support the launch of the newest BBC series, a new 'So Beano' TV execution ran in November 2017, creating a direct link to the brand.

Dennis and Gnasher: Unleashed! was the number 1 kids TV show in the first 3 weeks of its run, growing throughout, aided by the marketing campaign, to over 25% share of viewing, placing the show in the top 10 of all shows watched by kids.



SO BEANO campaign November 2017

From Iain Sawbridge, Chief Marketing and Digital Content Officer, Beano Studios

"So Beano, No Beano was one of those magical projects that was stronger than any campaign could be, it was a transformative idea. An idea which went beyond a marketing campaign (that itself surpassed all expectations) – it crystallized our approach to product development, to content tone and subject matter, to the comic editorial, even to our monthly internal award for high performers, the So Beano awards."