



A tepid brand suggests a tepid brew. That principle stands at the heart of the Coors Light campaign. “It’s filtered cold; it’s bottled cold,” the ad man says. How better, then, to promote the brand than with cold packaging? Ellie Broughton asks **Steve Mitchell**, senior innovator at Molson Coors, how colour-changing thermochromic inks, which show when a beer hits optimum drinking temperature, helped it to stand out.

Ellie Broughton: Talk us through the development of the thermochromic Coors Light campaign.

Steve Mitchell: Coors Light, as it is today, was launched in September 2007. One of the first things we did was to really promote thermochromic on the bottle. We took it from being a Rocky Mountain badge on the reverse of the label, because people had hardly seen it, and put it on the front using a die-cut method. It was important to us that we promoted the thermochromic ink on the front; we wanted a bottle that really stood out in back-bar displays and on the high street. In 2009, we introduced the big thermochromic icon to cans. We wanted to build value for our customers and create positive disruption in the beer aisle. But innovation’s a challenge when people see cans, at worst, as a poor relation to bottles.

EB: Was it hard to decide how to incorporate thermochromic inks into the campaign?

SM: No, not really. We knew exactly what the design needed to be, we knew what thermochromic had to do. The challenge was how we launched and delivered that.

“ You can do all the research you like, but you don’t know anything until your product is on someone’s shelf or in their chiller. ”

The goal was always a unified articulation of “Rocky Mountain cold refreshment”. Straplines come and go, as with any campaign, but that’s something Coors Light will always stand for. The thermochromic icon plays really strongly into that – it’s absolute proof that this is made cold, comes from a cold place and is to be served and enjoyed cold.

EB: Did the campaign’s practical aspects cause any concern?

SM: It was a big lay-down of ink to a scale we hadn’t done before – there was huge investment in just working through the technical feasibility, never mind the cost. So you can get this stuff to work but what if, as the cans run down the line, the ink scrapes off? How robust is it? How long a life has it got? So we went into product trial before we launched with Botterills Convenience Stores who are members of the SPAR symbol group in Scotland. We trialed this in 20 to 30 shops and did proximity advertising to support it.

For me this was an important step to show we’re deadly serious about the technology, and that we had trialed it live with consumers and asked for feedback. That’s the model that we want to adhere to more and more: get your learnings from where you’ll be. You can do all the research you like but you

don’t know anything until your product is on someone’s shelf or in their chiller.

EB: How does the UK operation position itself within the global Coors Light brand?

SM: Coors Light is a huge brand in North America. It was launched in 1978 and is the third largest brand in the US. The question for us has always been: “how do



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we communicate that point of difference?” For us, it’s all about cold refreshment. My role on Coors Light was working out how we create this unified brand experience that draws on the best of what people have in its top-performing markets, the US and Canada.

EB: How long has Molson Coors been using thermochromic inks?

SM: From memory, I think our first product with thermochromic packaging was Coors Fine Light beer (as it was then called) in the UK, a 5% product launched in 2002. It had a small thermochromic Rocky Mountains icon on the can and the back of the bottle. The technology we developed in the UK got our guys in the US very excited about thermochromic as a platform. It went to the States and came back in a big way, but in the meantime we used thermochromic on Carling and Caffrey’s packaging.



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