CHAPTER 10

Marketing at Crumpler
Interdependence of marketing and other key business functions

Each year, the focus of marketing represents a different avenue for the Crumpler brand. The marketing strategies used by the business are based on the operational developments of Crumpler. New releases across specific types of bags may be used as a primary focus for the marketing strategies of the business.

Types of markets

Crumpler began by offering messenger bags, but over the years has expanded to camera and laptop bags, duffel bags and luggage.

![Figure 10.1 'The Squid. Now you see it, now you don't. The incredible shrinking Squid is a stow-away drawstring backpack that appears on demand to accommodate your cargo carrying needs, then returns to the fold just as quickly' – Crumpler.](image)

The diverse range of Crumpler bags are all aimed towards 18–35-year-olds. This is reflected through their unique designs, emphasis on colour and quirky humour in naming their bag designs (The Seedy One, The Squid, The Old Banger, The Cashmere Blazer, etc.).

Crumpler, therefore, uses a market segment based on demographic segmentation.

Given the target market of Crumpler, the business is able to effectively develop unique designs for products that are considered to be mainstream. The use of colour is effective in creating a perception of uniqueness and fun within the brand, both within the business itself and its customers.

Competition

Because Crumpler offers a diverse range of bags, they have different competitors in different categories.

They have a well-established reputation for their messenger and camera bags, but the newer areas of travel goods and luggage are very competitive and price sensitive. They are responding to this by employing smarter and experienced luggage designers who can teach them how to develop products more cost effectively.

Crumpler’s success has meant that copycat and counterfeit goods are beginning to appear. Crumpler is setting up special arrangements with customs offices around the world that monitor ports for counterfeit goods.

Sales outlets and pricing

In Australia, Crumpler sells fairly exclusively through their own stores, so they are able to set and maintain their pricing.

In the USA, most of the product is sold through a dealer network. In...
order to maintain price, Crumpler set a manufacturer’s suggested retail price (MSRP) and the retailers agree to stick to this pricing as part of their reseller agreement.

In other countries, the sole distributors and importers monitor and manage pricing by also setting a MSRP.

Most reputable retailers are happier working with brands that monitor and work to maintain consistent pricing, as this protects their margin and makes it a worthwhile business.

**Marketing strategies**

The marketing strategies of Crumpler are deliberately informal and because their approach to business is to have fun, and as this approach has been successful, they intend to keep it that way.

Crumpler has always been known for its innovative, idiosyncratic approach to marketing, leading to consumer perception of unique and well-made bags made by a company that doesn’t take itself too seriously.

**Early days – guerrilla marketing**

One of the earliest Crumpler marketing ‘campaigns’ involved the three founders driving around and stencilling their logo (without any supporting text, or even the company name) on any available surface. Local authorities did not always look kindly upon graffiti advertising, which resulted in the trio being fined a few times in Melbourne – and in Dusseldorf, Germany, they even had to spend a night in jail. However, this approach generated a great deal of word-of-mouth publicity. As stated by Dave Roper, one of the founders of Crumpler, ‘It was a real adventure and a real challenge to actually get our products seen and bought and known. We just didn’t have much money – or any money – for marketing, so we thought that was a really easy, and cheap, way to promote the brand’.

In an interview with the ABC, interviewer Jayne Edwards said that Crumpler ‘is credited with pioneering what’s known today as viral marketing’. Although Dave Roper rejects this label: ‘that phase was coined in the mid-90s and it became quite a popular thing to do, so we don’t do it any more’.

**Demographic targeting**

Many of Crumpler’s marketing strategies specifically target their customer demographic: 18–35-year-olds who enjoy Crumpler’s casual and irreverent approach. These have included advertising in street magazines and free music magazines, where its advertising style fits comfortably. It also targets the student market by sponsoring university and college events, parties and competitions, and advertising in relevant magazines. The logo was included in the Melbourne Fringe Festival guide in the form of a flick book. In more traditional media, the Crumpler team made a 60-second cinema advertisement that ran in the art house cinemas Nova and Kino in Melbourne.

Other campaigns have included:

- short videos on YouTube and the Crumpler website
- paying apple growers to put the Crumpler logo on the stickers they place on their apples
- sponsorship of the SBS program Rockwiz
- sponsorship of a nude footrace at the Meredith Music Festival (in which runners have the Crumpler logo stencilled on their bodies).
‘Beer for bags’

Probably Crumpler’s most notorious strategy is its ‘beer for bags’ promotion. Each year, across all of its markets (excluding Adelaide and Brisbane), Crumpler encourages its customers to pay for their products through beer. In essence, beer becomes the currency accepted by Crumpler, for one week only. This unique promotional strategy has created a significant degree of controversy – which brought further publicity – across all its markets, both in Australia and overseas.

Trade shows

Because of its association with technology (camera and laptop bags), in 2005 Crumpler decided to exhibit at the 2005 International Consumer Electronics Show – the largest electronic and technology show in the USA. As a low-budget beginner to the show, the best exhibit space Crumpler could afford was a $30,000, 10 x 30 foot spot in a tented exhibit hall in the parking lot of the Las Vegas Convention Center. It had to find a way to stand out among the more than 2500 other exhibitors at the show. As with Crumpler’s consumer marketing campaigns, the solution was unconventional: they hired a University of Melbourne architecture student to design a low-tech environment consisting of 55-gallon oil drums and plywood walls and floors painted with green chalkboard paint. Crumpler bags were included with the design, but there was lots of space for people to write on the walls, which, as designer Michael Macleod said, ‘added to the interactive element of the booth. Plus, most people like drawing on walls’. As with other Crumpler marketing, this approach caused word-of-mouth advertising and by the end of the show, approximately 500 people had written messages on the walls of the booth, Crumpler brought in 50 qualified leads, and then signed three major companies for projects.

This booth was used at subsequent trade shows that year, and has been followed up by further, quirky designs, such as a boxy, fully recyclable cardboard booth in 2007, and an Escher-inspired look in 2008. Crumpler booths are frequently regarded as the most distinctive of the whole show – and this draws people to visit them.

Ethical influences on marketing

It has been suggested by some commentators that the ‘beer for bags’ campaign is encouraging the illegal trade of alcohol and promotes drinking amongst the 18–35 demographic.

However, Crumpler argues that they are not, in fact, promoting drinking among their customers: ‘we’re taking beer off the streets and giving you the bags’. In Brisbane and Adelaide, police closed down the sale, arguing that Crumpler were in
breach of liquor licensing laws. In fact, the publicity surrounding this issue (it was featured on local news TV and in newspapers, and even internationally) possibly helped to enhance the brand.

**Market research**

The original Crumpler bags had a very direct line of customer feedback. Stuart Crumpler, bag designer and co-founder of the company, was working as a bicycle courier for Minuteman Messengers (owned by Will Miller and Dave Roper, the other Crumpler founders) and designed the bag for his own use. Other couriers started using the bags, and told him what did and didn’t work with them, which Crumpler incorporated into his designs. In a letter to the Powerhouse Museum Stuart Crumpler wrote:

> Since they grew out of necessity, invention’s dear old Mummy, the early bags had everything the courier needed, but nothing they didn’t. Looks were not much of a concern, and they would not want to be since the canvas used got covered in road crud. Features? Not many, the early bags were a very simple pattern, a very simple bag. No zips to bugger up, just a few pockets and one main compartment.

Today, the development of Crumpler bags is often determined in-house through its team of designers, who are encouraged by management to bring ideas on board. Crumpler needed specific expertise to go forward, but also needed fresh ideas and new ways of doing things. Everyone has a say. Consumer input into the process is encouraged through consumer request forms available online and in-store.

**Consumer laws**

Crumpler’s warranty service is testament to the quality of their products. The business believes that their warranty should reflect the quality of the product and customer confidence in the product. Not just ‘a’ warranty, but the Legendary Crumpler ‘Til Death Do Us Part’ Warranty!

> If your Crumpler bag fails as a result of defective materials or workmanship under normal use while you: a) draw breath and b) remain the bag’s owner, we’ll repair or replace the part(s) in question – no questions asked. Just drop your bag off at a Crumpler Store or mail your bag to a Crumpler HQ, postage paid, together with your proof of purchase and a short note to explain the problem. We’ll make it right and send it back to you ASAP.

Source: www.crumpler.com/AU/FAQs.html#warranty

**Words from the founders**

**Dave Roper:** We very much enjoy having fun. We put that first, really, before anything else. If you don’t enjoy what you’re doing, and your staff aren’t happy, then why bother, really. Go and do something else.

**Will Miller:** Our method has always been, if we think it could work, do it, if not we learnt from it anyway.

**Dave Roper:** It has been an amazing ride, but we do work very hard. You have to, if you’re going to make it work. That’s the secret. I think you have to be stubborn too, and stick to your guns if you really believe in what you are doing.