

In Advertising

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Stuart Elliott's In Advertising

A Bare-Bones Strategy for Bottled Water

Since sex is often used in advertising, it should come as no surprise that the spokescharacter for a new brand of bottled water wears no clothes.

It is a little startling, however, that the character has no skin, either.



The character is a skeleton, meant to symbolize the calcium content of Sanfaustino, a 110-year-old sparkling mineral water now being imported into the United States from Italy. A print, online, retail and promotional campaign by Arena Partners features the skeleton, nicknamed Bones, to create an identity for Sanfaustino as "the calcium water."

The campaign, now under way, is indicative of efforts by smaller marketers in competitive categories like bottled water to develop niches in which they can flourish, rather

than go head-to-head — or, perhaps, skull-to-skull — with their far larger rivals.

In this instance, the benefits of calcium to fight osteoporosis and other health problems are intended to help differentiate Sanfaustino from the scores of other bottled waters being sold in American supermarkets and health-food stores. Sanfaustino, from a spring at the foot of the Martani Mountains in Umbria, Italy, lists among its ingredients 410 milligrams of natural calcium per liter, and the campaign promotes 8 glasses of Sanfaustino as providing more than 80 percent of the required daily amount of calcium for adults.

"This is a category with a lot of noise," says Bill Sipper, chief sales and marketing officer for CCW Holdings in Fairfield, N.J., which is distributing Sanfaustino in Asia, America and parts of Europe and South America. "Bones gives us a way to clear through the clutter."

"When I was visiting a major supermarket buyer in New England, I had a 34-page presentation," he recalls, "and I take out the sales sheet with Bones on it and 'Introducing the calcium water,' and he said: 'I get it. I want it in all my stores.' "

Sanfaustino was first sold in the United States in May, Mr. Sipper says, in health-food and gourmet stores like Balducci's and Fairway. The brand is now also being sold at supermarkets like Shaw's and Stop & Shop, he adds, as well as four regional divisions of the Whole Foods chain.

"At first I thought you cannot introduce another Italian water in the United States, but this one is different," Mr. Sipper says. "The calcium component is really intriguing."

One challenge for the campaign, Mr. Sipper says, is "making sure Americans know they can drink bottled water for what's in it," like Europeans, who scrutinize the labels of water brands for ingredients that are deemed healthful.

Typically in this country, he adds, consumers "drink bottled water for what's not in it," like impurities and chemicals.

"We want to change the way consumers look at bottled water," Mr. Sipper says. "It's a really big task, but we think it's really possible."



In the print ads and sales brochures, the skeleton character appears prominently in the center of each page. In one ad, Bones stands, arms akimbo, under the headline "If you think all bottled waters are the same, have we got a bone to pick with you." In a second ad, Bones leans against a green bottle of Sanfaustino, under this headline: "Make no bones about it. Sanfaustino is a good source of calcium."

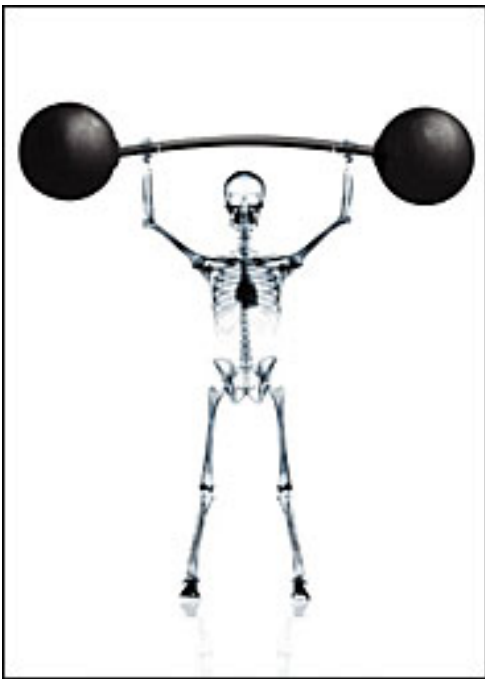
In a third ad, Bones is touching its toes under the headline "Now you won't have to bend over backwards to get more calcium." In a fourth ad, Bones is lifting a large barbell over its head, under a headline asking "Can a bottled water help strengthen bones?"

A similar approach is taken on the posters in stores and tags hanging from the necks of Sanfaustino bottles — known in the trade as bottle neck ringers — which show Bones leaning against a bottle under the words "Need more natural calcium?" and "Lightly effervescent."

On the Web site (sanfaustino.com), an animated Bones is busier than a skeleton at Halloween, walking, dancing, gesturing, pointing and performing all kinds of exercises, from skipping rope to doing chin-ups.

"It's important to make a focused, emotional connection" with potential customers, says Peter DePasquale, a partner in Arena, which is composed of principals in Los Angeles, New York and North Carolina. "Bones is fun and tells people right away, 'This has to do with bone health.'"

"We can do a lot with Bones, as we do on the Web site, because he's very flexible from a creative standpoint," Mr. DePasquale says, adding that eventually Arena would like to produce television commercials with the character.



"We have smaller clients that don't have huge budgets," Mr. DePasquale says, laughing. "Someday, we hope they have huge budgets." The initial budget for the Sanfaustino campaign, through January, is \$500,000.

The print ads will appear in the October through January issues of *Self* magazine, and Sanfaustino is a sponsor of the Self Center, a townhouse in Greenwich Village that the magazine is opening to readers through Oct. 13 as part of the celebration of its 25th anniversary.

In addition to the other elements of the campaign, Mr. DePasquale says, kits containing two bottles of Sanfaustino are being "mailed to a list of the managers and public relations firms of the top 500 celebrities in the New York area," in hopes their clients will be seen carrying or drinking the

water.

While the campaign portrays Bones as a lively skeleton, if that is not an oxymoron, there may be consumers who are squeamish about a symbol sometimes associated with death.

Indeed, Mr. Sipper says, "I have to tell you, my first reaction to the image was not a good one."

"My exact words to Peter were, 'I do not want to see a skeleton next to my bottle,' " he adds. "But the more we looked at it, the more we showed it to people, the more we realized it gains attention quickly, and people get it."