

Montreux, Switzerland  
22nd - 25th January 1989



XA04C0429

THE ROLE OF ADVERTISING IN PROMOTING SELLAFIELD  
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LADIES & GENTLEMEN

During the last two and half years, British Nuclear Fuels have spent approaching £9 million on advertising, expenditure designed to increase the public's acceptance of nuclear power and BNFL's operations in particular. That money has been spent against a difficult background, the campaign having started just seven weeks after the Chernobyl disaster, although the strategy, and indeed the launch advertisements, were developed before Chernobyl changed so many people's attitude towards nuclear power.

I believe I am right in describing this campaign as the largest so far in the world by a nuclear company, and the approach has certainly been unusual. The question is, is it working?

To answer that we have to look back to 1983 and 1984, when BNFL were hit by two major events, a discharge of radioactive materials on to beaches near Sellafield which attracted enormous, and of course, adverse press coverage, and secondly a television documentary revealing an excess of leukaemias in a nearby village to Sellafield. During 1985 and early 1986, almost anything that happened at Sellafield was potential front page news. Sellafield was seen by many in the nuclear industry, and not only in Britain, as a major problem, and the public, judging by opinion research conducted at the time, shared that view.

Research showed:-

Most people saw BNFL as an environmental polluter and a danger to health.

Sellafield was seen as a dangerous place at which to work or near which to live.

BNFL was seen as secretive and dishonest.

One of the major arguments for using advertising as the focal point of any major campaign is that, unlike press relations, it can be controlled. This was particularly important, as the press coverage was already bad, and something dramatic had to be done to change the situation. We needed advertising, we concluded, and we needed new and dramatic advertising which would start to create positive new stories. We also needed very effective advertising, and that meant television. In Britain today, over 80% of a typical person's information is gained from TV.

At first, we considered two fairly obvious strategies. To try and explain the benefits of nuclear power and BNFL's role, and secondly to explain the risks and put them into the context of other everyday risks.

We tested a large number of advertisements along these lines. It had been decided that, with a sensitive, emotive subject such as nuclear power, advertising pre-testing was absolutely vital, a decision we have never regretted. The research told us that

neither strategy was likely to work, for one basic reason. Nobody believed what we were saying. Clearly we had no credibility.

There was a further problem. The television authority, the Independent Broadcasting Authority said TV advertisements along these lines would not be authorised as they were deemed to be of a political nature, and political advertising is not allowed on television in Britain.

So we had to start afresh. Firstly, to overcome the objections from the television authorities, we developed some advertisements inviting the public to come to Sellafield and see for themselves. A little to our surprise, the advertisements were not only acceptable to the IBA but were also acceptable to the public when we tested them. It looked as if we had a campaign strategy at last, one which we described as 'Open and Honest'.

The campaign started in June 1986, with colour advertisements in magazines and newspaper supplements. Attached to the advertisement were invitation cards, with nine million printed. This was followed by a 50 second TV advertisement, broadcast nationally.

Our aim to make the campaign newsworthy certainly worked. With the help of a public relations exercise, the TV ad was shown on a wide range of news programmes, and many newspaper articles were written about this new approach to selling nuclear power to the public.

People started to visit Sellafield in ever increasing numbers. From 29,000 in 1985 we went to 65,000 visitors in 1986 (50,000 in the second half of the year after the campaign started). In 1987 it was up to 104,000 and 1988 158,000.

The biggest surprise was at the end of 1987, when Sellafield was named by the English Tourist Board as the country's fastest growing tourist attraction.

So what was the reaction of the public at large, not just those who visited Sellafield, because it was the total British population we were aiming at? Research showed they thought:-

The advertisements were responsible and informative

Not propagandist

They disarmed 'antis'

And they delivered a positive safety message - people said 'they would not let you in if it wasn't safe'.

Since then we've continued the theme with for example advertisements promoting special Steam Train trips to Sellafield using Britain's most famous steam engine, with five very successful trips in 1987. And we've run special two page ads which even promoted Greenpeace, an advertisement designed to reinforce the image of being open and honest and to show we were confident of our arguments. We also continued with TV ads in 1987, as you can see.

Much of the thinking has been based on one of the basic premises of all advertising - the better known you are, the better regarded you are. This basic argument has been the justification of brand advertising for years, and I believe exactly the same principle applies to industrial advertising and to issue advertising.

One major result of the success of the campaign in attracting visitors to Sellafield was that we had to improve our visitors facilities. We had an exhibition centre which was being literally overrun by visitors. We also wanted to improve our facilities for those visitors who wanted to tour the Sellafield site.

We started by introducing Sellafield Sightseer buses, equipped with videos, so that visitors could see what was happening in the plant, while many of our newer plants under construction are having viewing galleries incorporated into them.

And perhaps most dramatically we decided to build a new and much improved Visitors Centre, with a much enlarged and audio-visually orientated exhibition, plus other facilities such as a restaurant, souvenir shop, lecture rooms etc.

We were given approval for this new facility in May 1987, with an opening date of early June 1988, a timescale I would not recommend to any of you for a project of this scale. However, it proved easily enough time, as we finished a good 12 hours ahead

of schedule. Luckily 1988 was a Leap Year, or we might have been 12 hours late.

This was the advertisement that was broadcast within hours of the official opening of the Visitors Centre by the Duke of Edinburgh.

And here you can see some views of the Visitors Centre.

And is the Centre working? Well we have conducted research through MORI, one of Britain's major opinion research companies. It showed that 57% of those entering the Visitors Centre were either very or fairly pro-nuclear power. On leaving that figure had gone up to 79%. And those who were anti had fallen from 16% to 9%.

People were generally very impressed with the whole facility, and most important of all, said they could understand the information. Over recent years we have put enormous effort into making our audio-visuals, brochures, computer games and displays easily understood, using the language the general public speaks, and not the language of the nuclear industry.

We know therefore that our combination of advertising and visitors facilities is having a positive impact on those who visit Sellafield. And they are now becoming statistically significant, with perhaps 2 million likely to visit the Centre during the next 10-15 years. But what of the population as a whole? We have conducted a tracking study of our advertising programme since early 1986, and the figures show a gradual

improvement in BNFL's ratings over a whole series of measures, as you can see. There is however a long way to go, and we feel it is very important to quantify our objectives and measure performance through each year of the campaign.

To conclude, we have used advertising as a focal point in a campaign which incorporates many other areas of publicity - press relations, exhibitions, visits, films and brochures. We believe that advertising, and particularly TV advertising, is crucial in trying to achieve major changes in attitudes.

Finally, I would like to comment on a further piece of research we at BNFL, and organisations such as USCEA in the United States and the Canadian Nuclear Association have conducted. And that is to seek the public's view about the future. What emerged in Britain, Canada and USA was remarkably similar. Nuclear power was seen by over 70% of respondents as likely to be important in meeting electricity needs in the future. Nuclear was seen as the most important single source of generating electricity in the future. However much smaller numbers liked the idea of nuclear. There is clearly a communications gap to be filled to help make nuclear power more acceptable to the public. I believe that advertising is the single most effective method of promotion in helping to bridge that gap in the years to come.