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## Client Coverage

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# How Innocent keeps

**The drinks brand is going from strength to strength with the aid of a weekly online newsletter – in its individual, quirky style. By Adam Woods**

Few brands would be brave enough to ask their customers what new products they should launch and even fewer would be willing to admit that they don't actually know the return on investment from their marketing. But, then, Innocent Drinks is not your average brand.

In just over seven years, founders Richard Reed, Adam Balon and Jon Wright have built one of Britain's most distinctive and popular drink brands, all the while ignoring those who said they were breaking every proven business rule. This year, the firm will have a projected turnover of £50 million.

Until a few years ago, Innocent did very little marketing and didn't even have an ad agency on board, but it did produce a weekly email newsletter, with which it communicated with friends and family, and then with the growing army of fans of its organic fruit smoothies, who it now affectionately refers to as the 'Innocent Family'.

At the end of 2004, the firm was still sending out this newsletter from its own Outlook system: writing it in plain text, putting the email addresses in the 'bcc' boxes and pressing 'send'. Even with just 5,000 people on the list, it was too big a job for the Innocent team on their own.

"When we first started the newsletter, about seven years ago, it was sent to 11 people, at least 50 per cent of whom were mums of the people who worked at Innocent," says communications manager Dan Shrimpton. "It was a couple of stories of a few lines each, saying 'oh, we sold into a shop today' and 'Jon put in his expenses'."

"Over the years, as we've had more going on as a business, the email has a lot more substance, but we've always tried to maintain that light-hearted approach," he adds.

Innocent has clearly managed that as its most recent email begins: 'Autumn is inescapably approaching. There's plenty of it to love – crunchy leaves, drinking tea with purpose and getting your jumpers out from under the bed. Make sure you get out for some bracing walks, even if it means you miss a couple of these email updates. Off you go.'

The newsletter goes on to mention that the UN International Day of Peace is coming up and it supplies a link to the organisers' Peace One Day web site. Then, three paragraphs into the email, there is a cursory attempt to promote Innocent's brand new blackcurrant and gooseberry smoothie, which tails off into a rather tall tale about 18th Century 'gooseberry clubs', where people would, allegedly, congregate to compare the fruit they grew.

Then, there's mention of the fact that Watford FC has started stocking the drinks, followed by a suggestion that their form should pick up immediately ('they've got Wigan on Saturday – three points in the bag without a doubt, Brian'), and then an offer of bobbles to anyone who has failed to find any to make their Supergran hats.

### Invaluable tool

To an outsider, the e-newsletter may seem a bit of fun, with no real sales objective or business value, but it has proven to be a crucial tool for the brand. Over the last couple of years, in particular, it has helped the company to road test everything from TV ads to new drink flavours.

Sent out every Wednesday lunchtime, the newsletter has about 50,000 recipients. By Shrimpton's admission, Innocent has never quite got round to doing the usual standard things like calculating ROI. While many companies might have decided to outsource the whole thing by now, the email copy is still mainly written by Innocent's long-serving head of creative, Dan Germain.

But, two years ago, when the email list started to become too big to manage, Innocent realised it needed some professional help, so it turned to email specialist Pure 360. "Obviously, when it got to a certain point, it became a massive pain because, whoever sent out the email would have their machine churn away for hours," explains Shrimpton. "Also, by the time

Instead of sitting in an office with a lot of people twiddling their beards saying, 'hmm, what would the customers like?', it's a lot easier just to ask them

Dan Shrimpton  
Innocent Drinks

