Behind the Campaign: 
Wine and Cheez-It

This campaign is a 2020 REGGIE Awards Gold Winner, Small Budget Brand Activation Marketing
Though Kellogg’s Cheez-It brand had once differentiated itself with the claim that its crackers are made with “one hundred percent real cheese,” in recent years, an increasing number of its competitors could make the same claim. In response, the brand shifted to a marketing focus on innovation and new products, but Cheez-It base performance still suffered. To recapture consumer attention and reestablish the uniqueness of the brand, Cheez-It developed a collaboration with House Wine to offer a boxed pairing of wine and Cheez-Its, the “ultimate snack pack for grown-ups.”
“We all know that cheese and wine go together like peanut butter and jelly. And because Cheez-It crackers are made with one hundred percent real cheese, it seemed like a no brainer to put the two together!”

Erika von Borcke, Vice President, Weber Shandwick
Finding the Perfect Pairing

Cheez-It set three objectives for its wine and Cheez-It campaign:

1. Accelerate base Cheez-It business to five to six percent growth from one year earlier
2. Get people talking about Cheez-It
3. Garner 239,000 earned media impressions

To develop its campaign, Cheez-It first identified its target audience as “bold explorers,” adults who showed a desire for fun, creativity, and discovery with a focus on new tastes and experiences. The brand’s research on this demographic revealed an affinity for taking a break from “adulting” and relaxing with a beverage, snack, and TV, exemplified in social media trends like “Netflix binging,” “Rosé All Day,” and “Wine Down Wednesday.”

Brand researchers settled on a wine pairing as a creative way to bring attention to Cheez-It based on the shared Google trend curve of the terms wine and cheese. The data demonstrated that when consumers think of wine or cheese, they also think of the other.

With this insight about wine and cheese as the foundation, Cheez-It carefully considered how to build an attractive product. Recognizing the tendency of consumers to associate wine with pretentiousness, the brand chose boxed wine, a packaging option often associated with a more casual, laid back feel than its bottled counterpart. Cheez-It collaborated with House Wine, a brand with a preexisting consumer following in the boxed wine space. House Wine’s head winemaker selected a wine pairing based on the real cheese notes in Cheez-It crackers. Packaging designers then created a half wine, half Cheez-It box that capitalized on consumers’ familiarity with Cheez-It’s iconic red box.
“The idea was inspired by the age-old consumer behavior of pairing wine and cheese and designed to emphasize and elevate the brand’s real cheese equity. This absurdly satisfying mash-up of Cheez-It Original and House Wine Original Red Blend created a powerful, headline-driving program in year one.”

Erika von Borcke, Vice President, Weber Shandwick
Launching the “Ultimate Snack Pack for Grown-Ups”

Cheez-It and lead agency Edelman developed a three phase launch for its House Wine + Cheez-It limited edition product:

1. **Create Anticipation**—Cheez-It and Edelman pitched the news of the upcoming product release to food, lifestyle, consumer, and business media outlets. Campaign managers provided media in each targeted vertical with exclusive content, pitched under embargo to ensure that their stories would be published concurrently. Cheez-It lifted the embargo two days before the product launch date, which coincided with “National Wine and Cheese Day,” a move that resulted in extensive simultaneous coverage.
2. **Ignite Frenzy**—On July 23, 2019, Cheez-It announced its forthcoming House Wine + Cheez-It product, pushing the announcement on all social channels. The announcement from Cheez-It combined with coverage from social media influencers and media outlets such as USA Today, Food & Wine, Refinery29, and The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon created a buzz for the soon-to-be-released product. When it became available to buy on July 25, over 30,000 consumers scooped up all available boxes in minutes.

3. **Maximize Momentum**—Cheez-It and Edelman, in collaboration with House Wine, designed a wine and Cheez-It pairing guide that consumers could use to create and share their own pairings despite missing out on buying a limited edition box. Memes and additional user-generated content briefly extended the life of the campaign on social media.
“This campaign showcases the lightning in a bottle that can result from a limited time offering that’s rooted in consumer insights and hits a cultural sweet spot.”

Erika von Borcke, Vice President, Weber Shandwick
Campaign Results

The House Wine + Cheez-It campaign reached or surpassed its three objectives. During the week of the launch, Cheez-It sales increased 12.5 percent compared to the same week one year earlier. The campaign dramatically exceeded its target of 239,000 earned media impressions; it generated 568 million impressions and over 320 media placements, including ten syndications on Yahoo.com and six on MSN.com. Top-tier media outlets that covered the launch included Delish, CNN, People, Bustle, Food & Wine, Cosmopolitan, and theSkimm. Retail giants WalMart and Kroger expressed interest in carrying the custom boxes in store.

The success of the 2019 wine and Cheez-It campaign inspired the brand to build a 2020 campaign around another pairing and limited edition product launch: House Wine Rosé + White Cheddar Cheez-Its. Campaign architects analyzed data and cultural trends to land on this flavor combo, a match the brand calls even “buzzworthier” than the 2019 offering and “the pairing of the summer.” The 2020 campaign far outperformed the original 2019 wine and Cheez-It launch, generating a total of 1.1 billion impressions and 10,000 media placements. It also sparked an impressive amount of social media conversation, generating over 192 million social impressions.
“Sometimes you can strike gold on a pilot program or test and learn, like we did for a beloved program like Cheez-It and Wine. You also know you’ve created something special when boxes need to be kept under extra watch to ensure they don’t mysteriously ‘disappear’ from the office.”

Erika von Borcke, Vice President, Weber Shandwick
Jeff Haber at the ANA recently spoke with Erika von Borcke, Vice President, Weber Shandwick about the original 2019 House Wine + Cheez-It campaign and the development of its successor, the even more successful 2020 House Wine Rosé and White Cheddar Cheez-It campaign.

**Q&A**

**Q** What role does company culture play when it comes to leveraging innovative marketing ideas?

**A** Kellogg’s ambition is to be agile and nimble, and this applies everywhere from product development to marketing. Finding the cultural inspiration outside of the company to inspire great work internally helped push Cheez-It and Wine forward. The insight and idea were so strong, we were also able to align internal champions to ensure the idea could go to market successfully.

**Q** Had Cheez-It done anything like this previously? How did upper management at Kellogg’s react to the idea of doing Wine and Cheez-It?

**A** This campaign is the first time Cheez-It has ventured into partnering with the wine industry. While eyes were on this program from the highest level, Kellogg’s leadership supported it from the start thanks to the simplicity and strength of the idea. That it was able to return for a second year illustrates the support we had to bring it to market.
What KPIs did you use to measure success, how did you determine them, and did they evolve over time?

In 2019, the Cheez-It and Wine box sold out in minutes, but the conversation slowed after launch. We wanted to bring the program back, making it even bigger and better the second time around and sustain conversation beyond the product release. We set KPIs for success based on impressions (a goal of 705 million), sell out, volume of coverage, sustained conversation, and website page views. Altogether, the Cheez-It White Cheddar and House Wine Rosé campaign exceeded every expectation set and got massive coverage in both pop and industry culture. Top results include:

- The new Cheez-It White Cheddar and Rosé box sold out in under an hour and generated a total of 1.1 billion impressions and 10,000 media placements, exceeding program goals and blowing away year one results.*

- The campaign drove coverage across key broadcast, print, and online media, landing features and mentions in outlets including The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, Late Night with Seth Meyers, ABC News, People, Food and Wine, Thrillist, POPSUGAR and more.

- The campaign sparked social conversation with over 192 million social impressions and 11,000 qualified social media sweepstakes entries.

*Impressions based on Cision UVPM data with a 4x divider applied for online placements, social media followers for social media placements, and Neilson data for broadcast impressions.
Was there any concern about pairing with a spirit brand? Did you incorporate any precautionary measures or safety notices within the campaign about responsible drinking?

We worked closely with Kellogg’s legal and leaned on House Wine to ensure we were following all proper marketing guidelines and serving and consumption disclaimers for promoting alcohol products. To be mindful of following recommended serving size and consumption, we encouraged consumers to enjoy Cheez-It White Cheddar and House Wine Rosé over time or together with a small group.

Does Cheez-it plan on continuing this campaign, or campaigns pairing with other brands in other verticals, in the future?

While we can’t comment on future plans, getting people to care enough about you to breakthrough with brand-first ideas requires crafting ideas rooted in cultural and personal insights. This structure brings that relevance for consumers so that when people see your brand, they see their interests and needs.
Q&A

“Please feel free to share any additional thoughts about the campaign that may be interesting or helpful to marketers.

A breakthrough limited time offering like Cheez-It and Wine can drive consumption of a brand’s core base, engaging current consumers and reminding lapsed ones of the reasons they love the brand. (The 2020) campaign ultimately established Cheez-It White Cheddar and House Wine Rosé as the flavor combination of the summer, setting a precedent for mashup snack foods and inspiring consumers everywhere to enjoy Cheez-It and Wine.”
SOURCES
