13 MARCH 2023

Insight & Strategy: You're not wrong /

Saga Travel

How a holidays and insurance provider used humour to break with stereotypical portrayals of age and open up its new custom holiday offering to a wider audience

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_couBIqcsc

In February 2023, British holidays and insurance provider **Saga Travel** launched its brand campaign **You're not wrong** to promote the launch of its holidays product, Tailor-Made Travel by Saga.

The one-minute ad, created in partnership with **VCCP**, London, is a humorous take on what a holiday looks like for people over 50. It depicts an English gent, played by actor Nicholas Farrell, going on a wide range of active adventures, addressing the camera while listing assumptions viewers might have about what someone his age likes to do on a holiday. For instance, he says 'You think we're just pootling along' as he motors along in a dune buggy.

The ad launched on TV on 1 February. Shorter versions of the ad will also be rolled out on social media and digital. The media plan includes a small amount of print.



To find out more about the strategy behind Saga Travel's new positioning and how the brand took on the challenges of connecting with an older demographic, Contagious spoke with VCCP executive creative director **Jim Thornton** and senior planner **Nathan Velayudhan**, as well as Saga Travel Group CEO **John Constable**. They told us that:

- Saga was struggling because of an ingrained brand image that made it hard to recruit the new customers needed to drive growth
- The agency focused on shifting attitudes through a brand-building campaign that uses wit and dry British humour to challenge preconceptions of age
- You're not wrong is the latest edition of a positioning that started in 2021 and was informed by quantitative res on how the over-50s' view themselves and want a freer holiday experience

Tell us about the brand and how it has evolved over the years.

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Nathan Velayudhan: Saga has been creating products and services for the over-50s for a while across the likes of cruises, insurance and holidays, which is what this latest campaign is about. And for a while, that positioning was its greatest strength. Saga started out as a database marketing business, so they have a huge database of over-50s that they'd use to market to them. But we found out that it wasn't bringing the slightly younger customer to that marketing funnel, which meant that as their audience aged, the brand aged over time as well. This was a big problem for the business because it meant they weren't necessarily driving growth.

There's a of hugely entrenched perception of the brand, and that's the challenge the brand faces as a business. Shifting that to reflect where it's at today is the starting point of every brief

Nathan Velayudhan, VCCP

John Constable: Qualitative research showed that our holidays are perceived as very organised, slow-paced and fully-escorted groups of people rather than independent. We found that the customer that's a bit younger than our average customer today want to be guided and feel reassured, especially after the pandemic, but they don't need full guidance. That's where the product creation came out, so that people can feel 'I can travel with Saga, do whatever I want to do and can be backed by Saga'.

Jim Thornton: The other interesting thing for me was Saga was an interesting business when it originally started in an entrepreneurial way in England. The challenge was how do you fill hotels out of season. This goes back to when people had a two-week holiday in the summer and didn't go abroad. The founder had the very smart idea that retired people are the ones who have time to go to places out of season. Then interestingly, they moved into cruises when the insurance business started, because over-60s realised that they couldn't get insurance from anywhere being away from home for longer than two weeks. So Saga started providing insurance. You had this really smart entrepreneurial business that was very British and had a strong place in the British psyche, but that had become outdated in people's perception.

Who are Saga's closest competitor brands in the UK?

Velayudhan: It largely changes by the different verticals that we're operating in. In holidays, you're looking at the likes of Tui at the mass market end. At the tailor-made end, you're also looking at companies like Cox & Kings. In cruise, competitors include P&O and Viking. And in the insurance space, there's Churchill and the AA.

The evolvement for us was about the insight of how our customers live for experiences. We realised that although we're doing good experiences, we need a broader range

John Constable, Saga Travel

What is the business challenge?

Velayudhan: As soon as you say Saga, people's reaction is something along the lines of 'Come on, I'm not that old.' There's a of hugely entrenched perception of the brand, and that's the challenge the brand faces as a business. Shifting that to reflect where it's at today is the starting point of every brief. A lot of what we've been doing is about helping Saga facilitate that transition through bringing in slightly younger customers.

Thornton: And being asked to change people's perception of something that is fairly ingrained, and that is one of the best advertising tasks you can ever get as a creative. It's a great challenge.

Who was the target for this campaign?

Thornton: We didn't want to alienate the customer, who is the person aged 65 to 70. But we had to appeal to the 50-plus audience.



How long has VCCP been working with Saga?

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Thornton: It goes back about eight years. Saga has been through different ownerships in that time. They've had a new CEO, Euan Sutherland, who came in with a desire to reinvent the brand. And it's always helpful to work with a CEO and CMO who are both absolutely clear on what they want to do.

The brand refresh around 'Experience is Everything' was in 2021, although we had done a huge amount of work with them in the previous five years. Going back a couple of years, Saga didn't have new products that we could talk about, which meant that then it had to become a point of view and an attitude. And right from the start, I was certain that tackling the stereotypes of being old was going to be one of the things that we wanted to do. 'Experience is Everything' came out of a desire to shift the perceptions of older people from just being old to the fact that they have lived a life, and they have all of this experience. They are a generation who wants to experience more of life and have the money and the time to do that.

Constable: Experience is Everything became part of a transformation strategy for Saga, and a lot of the marketing we've doing has been based on that rock. The evolvement for us was about the insight of how our customers live for experiences. We realised that although we're doing good experiences, we need a broader range.

How does this campaign move on from the Experience is Everything campaign?

Thornton: This year's requirement was to sell a new product, which is Tailor-Made holidays, very much designed for this audience's wants and desires from a holiday. Our challenge was: How do we tackle that, since this isn't a holiday that fits with most people's perceptions of a Saga holiday?

Velayudhan: We felt like it was a natural and soft evolution. We knew the earlier work done on our positioning was landing really well and that people understood the message we were trying to communicate, which lent us some more leeway when discussing what a Saga holiday is.

The key business objective was changing brand perception. In the brief, we asked VCCP to bring out the elements the research revealed that people want to see from Saga: more exhilarating things. We asked them to be very brave

John Constable, Saga Travel

What was your initial response to the brief?

Thornton: The first brief was during lockdown, so about three years ago. I found it really interesting because I was 57 when I took it, and it was about engaging people in their 50s in Saga. Two things stood out for me. The first thing is that I would never have considered Saga as a brand for my age group. So that meant I had the personal motivation to work on the brief.

The other is that I was heading towards 60, I realised that the portrayal of age is so out of step with how people my age feel, especially in advertising where one has to deal with stereotypes.

Velayudhan: It was a bit of a process that was over a few weeks. And it wasn't a traditional handoff of 'here's a brief'. It was us and the client in a room, over a series of meetings hashing it out and understanding what their product was going to be. And at that stage, it was still evolving as a product. That necessitated agility on our side.

This audience feels that they are not addressed or spoken to very well in most advertising. And they feel that most of it is targeted at much younger people

Jim Thornton, VCCP

What were the key business objectives?

Constable: Changing brand perception. In the brief, we asked VCCP to bring out the elements the research revealed that people want to see from Saga: more exhilarating things. We asked them to be very brave. Hence the dune and the safari scenes in the ad. We wanted to plant the idea that Saga was offering something different from what it historically has done. The other business objective was growth. We wanted to tell people about our new product range that builds on what we've done so that our existing customers can see that we continue to develop, and new fans of Saga can also see that our range has expanded dramatically.

I believe that advertising should be charming, because I don't quite understand why I should listen to someone who isn't being charming. And much charm comes with wit and humour, so I was certain from the ad was going to be funny

Jim Thornton, VCCP

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What does success look like for this campaign?

Constable: Success looks like new customers to Saga that are enjoying what we're delivering for them, not only from a product perspective, but also from a value perspective. It's also about cementing Saga as an authority in wide ranges of travel styles, rather than what we had previously shown, in an increase in demand, enquiry and engagement.

Velayudhan: There are three things that we're always going to be looking at for a campaign like this. The first one is perception. Would people agree with: 'Saga is a brand for people like me'? The more people that think that, the more bookings Saga gets. The more people that would consider Saga, the more people will look in our shop window. And then lastly, we look at bookings in the short-term.



There aren't nearly enough funny ads on TV anymore. It's that simple

Jim Thornton, VCCP

What was the insight? Was it informed by any research?

Velayudhan: This campaign started with quantitative research led by Saga's internal team. The research looked at the attitudes and behaviours of this audience in relation to what they really want out of a holiday today. A lot of that revealed that a lot of over-50s and 60s want more of an independent experience than a super-planned package holiday. That was a really important insight for us, and you'll see it reflected in the ad where the actor Nicholas Farrell isn't being led by anyone. He's depicted to have a jovial experience that shows his independence.

Thornton: We knew anecdotally but we learned from research as well that this audience feels that they are not addressed or spoken to very well in most advertising. And they feel that most of it is targeted at much younger people to a level of frustration. They think: 'We have more money than them, why are people not talking to us the way that we want to be spoken to?' And all that they expect is to be spoken to intelligently and with respect. This is why it made sense in the first instance to focus on the portrayal of the consumer rather than the brand. Whether it was about holidays, or whether it was just about the perception of people in their 50s and above, the insight points we got from research informed our direction: tackling preconceptions.

Why did you choose to use humour to tackle these preconceptions?

Thornton: There aren't nearly enough funny ads on TV anymore. It's that simple. My generation grew up watching funny ads. There is a whole generation who feels that part of the reason they're not spoken to is executional. I think they feel that too many ads are done for visual effects and aren't talking to them wittily. I believe that advertising should be charming, because I don't quite understand why I should listen to someone who isn't being charming. And much charm comes with wit and humour, so I was certain from the ad was going to be funny.

And specifically, given that we were tackling quite a serious prejudice and stereotype in ageing, it was always going to be easier to do so using humour and a bit of irony. In a way, we talked about that topic in the same way that this generation does. The older and more experienced you get, the more willing you are to laugh at yourself.

How did you ensure the humour would land?

Thornton: The most important thing for us was the casting of the ad. We wanted a character who had that dry, understated delivery. We wanted someone who was a really good actor. We didn't just want a celebrity, we needed someone who would embody and understand the attitude that we're talking about.

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Did the client take any convincing?

Thornton: Yes, a little bit. But it was relatively easy. I think they knew that it was right, this is a new product and we needed to be brave in our approach. We did quite a lot of research on the direction of the campaign, and which was all unfailing and really helped us with the convincing.

What about the media plan – how was this rolled out?

Velayudhan: The initial rollout is TV. There's also a lot of paid social because we know it's a really good way of getting to the audience, a small amount of print and some digital display formats.

Over the next two to three months, we'll be keeping tabs on what's working and what's not, and we'll aim to be responsive and shift in different assets accordingly.

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