

Liquid Death Marketing Case Study

Just imagine a brand that sells bottled water. Cold winds on a mountain; calm, serene oceans; and a bottle of plastic – that is what comes to mind, right?

Ironically, almost 3.5 million people die because of water each year as per a report by United Nations. Well, Mike Cessario, a former Netflix Creative Director, decided to leverage this violent side of the coin to his advantage.

The story of Liquid Death was born during Mike's travels with the Warped Tour in the early 2000s where he saw the show's sponsor, Monster Energy struggle to maintain relevance. The performing stars were craving refreshment but not in the form of an energy drink; and it would've been a waste of dollars of the crowd watched them down bottles of water instead of their product. Monster came up with a master solution – special canned water for the stars to provide the illusion of punk rock drinking Monster. The result? Kids were lead to believe that monster was the coolest beverage to exist.

Inspired from the “bottled cool” element, Mike led to create the most outlandish water company to exist – Liquid Death. In 2018, he went on to take a 3D rendering of his can before even producing one real product and created a two-minute commercial on a Facebook page to make it look like a real product. Just four months, later the page had over 80,000 followers and the commercial stacked a mind-blowing 3 million views – all without a real product!

STP – Segmentation. Targeting. Positioning.

An STP strategy is very helpful in identifying potential consumers and formulating a unique proposition for them. This ensures that we know who we want to sell to, how we want to sell to them and what will make them buy.

Segmentation

- **Geographic:** The canned mountain water sells across over 133,000 stores across the US & UK.
- **Demographic:** Their audience majorly includes millennials and Gen Z populations who appreciate humor, wit and authenticity. The kind of people are often resistant to traditional advertising and hence, Liquid Death's bold, offbeat marketing approach.
- **Psychographic:** The brand majorly emphasizes on the destructive characteristic of water and the aesthetic of heavy metal; appealing as a cool can of water – because what if the most metal thing that you could imagine was a good, old can of H₂O.
- **Behavioral:** Liquid Death capitalized on the young cool kid who doesn't want to drink at a party but still wants to look cool and not just empty-handed.

Targeting

Liquid Death, unlike other water brands, focuses on the destructive power of water. Their tagline – “Murder Your Thirst” not only creates a bold persona for the brand; but also appeals to the market segment they value. They don't want to come across as a water brand; they strive to come across as a reflection of their target audience – the young, cool kids.

Positioning

The brand positions itself as “the most metal thing you can imagine”. While keeping the cool, bold image consistent; Liquid Death also pours in their effort towards sustainability by using aluminum cans instead of plastic bottles.

Marketing Strategy

Well, this is the most interesting part about Liquid Death. The brand is first and foremost a content creation company; their product was always secondary.

In 2019, they raised USD 1.6 million in seed funding from a round led by Science Inc. However, by 2020 they had raised USD 23 million in a Series B round. How did they even scale that fast? It was due to their multi-pronged approach.

First, they created a marketing storm. Liquid Death did things backward – they went viral online, particularly on TikTok, before even having a drink to sell. They prioritized building a brand and a community, which paid off big time with views and funding to launch their product. They really clicked with Gen Z by understanding their desire for healthy, eco-friendly, and fun products. This shows the power of putting fans first and exploring multiple revenue streams.

Then followed the Country Club because Liquid Death knows that the primal reason for its success is its fanbase. Basically, the Liquid Death Country Club is a membership deal where fans pay a fee to get first dibs on merch and event tickets. It's a smart move to bring in more cash outside of just selling drinks. Right now, they've got around 225,000 members, which shows people are totally into buying into the brand's whole vibe and events. Again, spending loads on the brand, not the product.

To top that, Liquid Death, being an internet-famous brand, jumped into the NFT game early. You know, NFTs—those blockchain-based digital things that get valuable because there's only so many of them. They dropped their own set called Murder Head Death Club, 6,666 freaky severed head NFTs, some even doodled by Will Carsola from Adult Swim. Every NFT is basically someone "taken out" by Liquid Death. Snag one of these and you get cool perks like exclusive merch, discounts, and other Liquid Death goodies.

They didn't stop here. In 2020, Liquid Death really took off, landing in Whole Foods and testing the waters at 200 7-Elevens across the US. They also hit it big on Amazon, becoming the third top-selling sparkling water, which then opened doors to selling at exclusive events. Then, in 2021, they snagged another \$15 million in funding from Live Nation, who agreed to sell their drinks exclusively at their venues for a while. That deal, plus others, boosted their revenue up to \$45 million in 2021.

Liquid Death's hit big not just because of good water, but mostly because of their crazy marketing and branding. They made a really different and rebellious brand, and that's what got people hooked. This cool identity made them super noticeable in a packed market and helped them grow really fast.

Remarkable Campaigns

Deadliest Stuff on Earth

The Liquid Death launch campaign really nailed it with their brand personality. That one ad with the aspirational vibe, catchy music, surprising stats, and a bit of colorful language from a "professional actor" is probably the one you remember best. It all leads to this totally over-the-top, funny ending.

The ad's quick cuts of actors, action, and stock footage really hold people's attention, which is great since it's tough to keep viewers focused with short attention spans and hard to get started with introductions. There are a few interesting plots going on to keep you hooked. The thing with the actor and their water bottle gets explained in a cool way when we find out why the water is there, and the story totally changes how you think about water. The actor's serious way of talking and the stuff they say make Liquid Death seem like "something parents won't like, but kids could be into... it's basically just water."

Big Game

Liquid Death went with a pretty wild Super Bowl ad in 2022. Think loud rock music, kids going nuts with their tallboys, and the song's whole thing was about "breaking the law." It definitely got people talking.

A pregnant woman comes in, smiles, and takes a sip from the can, instantly putting viewers at ease. The screen then reads, "No worries, it's just water." So, Liquid Death's Super Bowl ad? Genius. They totally played us with the whole underage drinking thing. It was all about that shock factor, right? They knew if they made us think something crazy was happening at first, the big reveal would be way more fun. Basically, they nailed how to grab attention and give people that "whoa, didn't see that coming" feeling we all secretly love.

Blind Taze Test

Liquid Death definitely sparks opinions, some love it, some don't. Instead of firing back at negative comments on Twitter, they did something totally unexpected. They actually invited the people who wrote those tweets to come on over for a, shall we say, electrifying experience.

Participants were connected to a taser and given different unlabeled brands of water to drink. They had to identify the "worst tasting" water as Liquid Death; if they failed, they would receive an electric shock from the Liquid Death team.

Brands struggle to address negative comments online; it's tricky to not look bad or upset their audience. Liquid Death cleverly turned negative feedback into sales. They did a fun, shareable game show thing that answered criticisms and showed off their brand in a cool, different light.