

Carrefour: Black Supermarket

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Carrefour, the supermarket chain, proved its commitment to food quality and improved brand love through a direct campaign centred on a brand-owned experience in France.

- With many varieties of seeds for healthier cereals, vegetables and fruits deemed illegal, Carrefour needed to defy the law to change it.
- The Official French Catalogue of Species and Varieties in France determines which seeds are eligible to sell and cultivate, but this forbids 97% of the country's agricultural biodiversity.
- The brand stocked and sold illegal products in its national stores, creating illegal Black Supermarkets – a stunt that revealed great-tasting products that were illegal to sell and produce.
- Carrefour's petition to change the law accumulated more than 83,000 signatures, and in April 2018 the European Parliament passed new legislation permitting farmers to grow and sell their own varieties.

Campaign details

Advertiser: Carrefour

Brand: Carrefour

Agency: Marcel Paris

Country: France

Objectives

This case study shows how in changing the law, the Black Supermarket changed Carrefour. It shows how Carrefour, one of the biggest worldwide retailers, used its leadership power to change an unfair law that destroyed 90% of our agricultural biodiversity during the 20th century. A political change that triggered a fundamental transformation of the brand's image, restored public confidence in the brand, made it the favorite

retail brand in France, and accelerated the transformation of its international corporate strategy.

- **Objective #1 – political: Changing the law to overturn the destruction of our agricultural biodiversity.**

In Europe, people have access to only 3% of existing cereals, vegetables, and fruits. The other 97% (two millions 'farmers' varieties') are illegal. Why? Because an absurd European law forbids all farmers' varieties, the ancestral varieties of our grandparents. Only hybrid, pesticide-resistant seeds – patented by the agro-chemical industry – are authorised. It's been law in Europe since 1981. As a result, 90% of farmable varieties have already disappeared worldwide since the 20th century; farmers must depend on pricey hybrids or be sued; and consumers are deprived from a wide range of superior produces, richer in nutrients, taste, and better for the environment.

No one knew about this, except a handful of militant farmers. After 40 years of prohibition, dozens of draft laws by farmers' associations had been rejected in the indifference of the media. It was time a big retailer revealed the issue to all in order to change the political agenda.

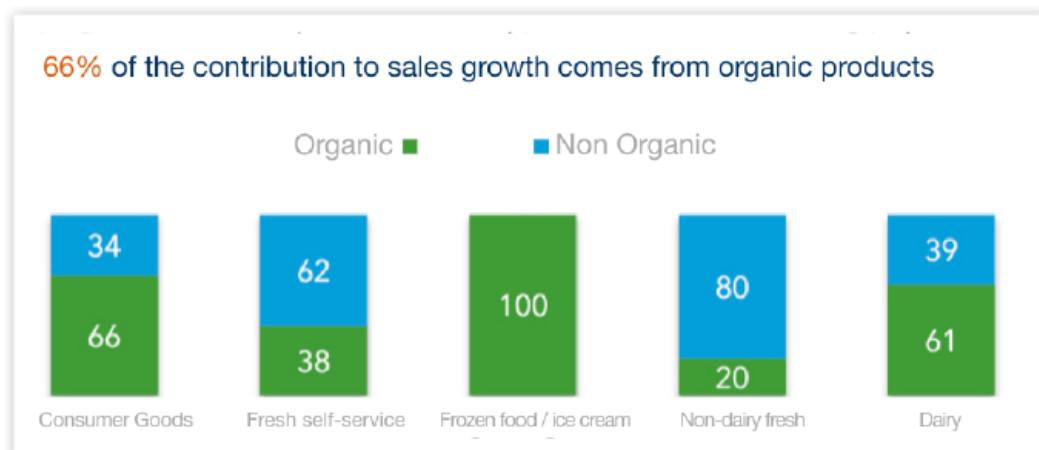
- **Objective #2 – image: Changing Carrefour's image by turning its leadership power into a force for good.**

Since the 1990s, Carrefour has fought for food quality. But few knew about it in France, as Carrefour still suffered from its image of big bad wolf of the CAC 40, inventor of big retail in France. Carrefour is too big to be good in consumers' minds, especially at a time when small is beautiful in the food industry: small producers, small shops, no intermediaries. In this context, we aimed to turn Carrefour's leadership into a positive and reveal its long-term commitment to food quality to the eyes of all, especially through its commitment to the bettering of the agricultural industry. An image objective linked to a business objective, as in the retail category in France brand preference is the heart of the matter, and leading in consumers' hearts soon leads to increased traffic.

- **Objective #3 – marketing and commercial: Launching a product range never seen before in the retail sector, generating a maximum number of sales.**

We had to create and launch an illegal organic range of fruits, vegetables and cereals with the highest quality standard, that would give us a big advantage over the French organic market in France, at a time when 66% of growth in retail in France is generated by organic (*See fig. 1*). The creative idea had to properly market the offer, and translate into a maximum number of sales, within the limits of our illegal supply.

Fig.1



Creative work

To change an unfair law that forbids 97% of our agricultural biodiversity, Carrefour decided to defy the law, and launched the Black Supermarket. Illegal Black Supermarkets were created in Carrefour's stores nationally to sell illegal varieties of cereals, vegetables, and fruits. Against powerful lobbies, we chose the illegal path to make sure we'd be heard by key opinion leaders, the public, and politicians up to Brussels where decisions are made. It was the first time a retailer broke the law to make it change.

To get maximum awareness, we decided to launch the campaign during the French General Assembly on Food, a major government summit reuniting politicians and the food industry.

- The campaign pre-launched on September 19th, with an exclusive 'illegal dinner' with chef Christophe Saintagne inviting KOLs and journalists to discover these delicious illegal varieties. There they witnessed the signature of our contract with producers. Because we had no certainty as to whether or not we could change the law, we signed a five-year supply contract with our producers to protect them, guaranteeing we would buy their illegal production and pay the fines if necessary. KOLs also witnessed the donation of €1 million to our biodiversity fund for farmers' seeds preservation. We chose to launch our Change.org petition during the event, so KOLs would be the first signatories and the first to share the petition. It allowed us to rally powerful ambassadors: journalists, chefs – usually critical of the retail industry – to fuel the conversation.
- On September 20th, our illegal Black Supermarkets opened in 400 stores nationally, allowing everybody to support the cause. In store we asked people to join the cause by buying our illegal range and by signing our petition on Change.org to change the law. It was the best media to allow consumers to discover these deliciously illegal products, richer in nutrients and in taste, and understand the issue, thanks to our spectacular herbariums that staged seeds from 600 forbidden varieties.
- Print, outdoor, films, social media and our in-store Black Supermarket installations revealed the absurdity of the law, and turned our illegal producers into national heroes. Our producers lent their voice on as many media outlets as we could, asking people to sign the petition, favoring social-media and digital to drive directly to the petition.

Our media strategy was to use our first media – our stores – to both create a national debate and maximise the exposition of our campaign among our clients. Indeed, during the 11 months of our Black Supermarkets, we were able to generate more than 200 million in-store impressions. While coordinated media buys and PR rollout on social and digital drove people to our Change.org petition, generating 83,355 signatures.

Strategy

Using Carrefour's leadership power to fight for biodiversity, food quality, producers' rights, and consumers' health:

The original client brief was to change the perception of the brand – seen as the big CAC 40 retailer – by revealing their deep and long-standing commitment toward French agriculture. To do so, we positioned Carrefour on a fight that is dear to their core-community of organic farmers and close to their core business, as organic products are generating 66% of total retailer growth in France at the moment. By rallying clients and potential clients behind a greater cause, we believed we could change people's perception of the brand. The cause: the reauthorisation of Farmers' varieties, the ancestral varieties of our grandparents. A fight against

powerful lobbies, that only a retail leader could take, in the name of biodiversity, food quality, producers' rights and consumers' health. And all this starting right inside our stores. The final creative work had to achieve a real political change in favour of biodiversity, that would affect Carrefour's brand image in the long run, and create a sustainable sales-generating range.

Changing the law by breaking it before the eyes of all:

Changing a European law is an impossible mission when you're up against the powerful agro-chemical lobby. We could have chosen the legal way: submit a bill, work our way up the bureaucracy, and wait years to see it crushed by lobbies. But after 40 years of prohibition and dozens of draft laws had been rejected in the total indifference of the media, we chose the most unconventional, noisiest way – the illegal way.

To get maximum awareness, we launched the campaign during the General Assembly on Food, a major government summit reuniting politicians and the food industry. We first targeted KOLs – chefs, philosophers, prominent journalists – to put farmers' seeds on the public agenda. We then targeted the general public to create a plebiscite for the cause and bend the political agenda.

To create a direct consumer response we used our first medium – our stores – to sell our illegal range to everyone, allowing consumers to show their support by buying en masse. With a simple call to action for consumers: to change the law, choose to buy illegal varieties, and sign the petition. Our strategy was simple, against lobbies working behind closed doors, we chose provocation before the eyes of all.

Campaign composition

Type of Media/Channel <i>Please list all</i>	Date of Implementation <i>Start & end, including the year</i>	Budget or Media Spend	Country/Region of Placement
Facebook, Twitter, Youtube	20.09.17 to 31.12.17	270 000 euros	France
Outdoor	20.09.17 to 20.12.17	450 000 euros	France
Press - Le Figaro & Le Parisien	22.09	57 000 euros	France
Instore Display	20.09.17 to august 2018	Owned media - 400 stores	France

Commercial results

The Black Supermarket changed the law, and it changed Carrefour

We changed the law to reauthorise farmers' seeds, by generating public awareness and mobilisation. And by generating public awareness and mobilisation behind this greater cause,

We changed people's perception of the brand.

I. Media outcomes

- **Awareness impact:** The Black Supermarket hacked the conversation on the French General Assembly on Food and generated a national debate. Every evening news TV show, radio show and major newspaper covered the campaign (France 2, France 3, M6, LCI, C8, BFM TV, RTL, France Inter, Europe 1, RMC, Liberation, Marianne, Les Echos, Le Parisien...), generating a total of **174** pieces of media coverage. Public figures joined our fight: prominent chefs, journalists, even historic opponents of the retail industry like farmers' syndicates. The campaign generated **377 million** media impressions, **592 million** total impressions including instore displays. Even our worst detractors joined our fight. Like Perico Legasse, editor-in-chief of Marianne and a strong critic of Big Retail, who declared it was "a historic moment for retail" (*See extract in the case-study video*). It was impossible to miss the Black Supermarket, nor to ignore the issue anymore.

II. Target audiences outcomes

- **Public mobilisation and consumer behaviour impact:** The public was baffled to discover this absurd law. When presented with a choice, they overwhelmingly chose farmers' varieties over regular ones. Consumers bought the illegal goods en masse in our stores: 70 tons around the time the law changed, and a total of **153 tons** at the end of summer – our maximum due to scarce illegal supply. Consumers' mobilisation went well beyond our stores, as people overwhelmingly supported the cause and signed our petition 83,355 times.
- **Political impact and legislation change:** The campaign went live during the General Assembly on Food and was impossible to miss. Carrefour sent its lobbyists to the General Assembly and to Bruxelles against Bayer-Monsanto. And thanks to Carrefour's lobbying power and to the public support generated by the campaign, a proposal was introduced in November 2017, included in a new law proposal for organic agriculture. On April 19th 2018, the EU ratified this new regulation on organic agriculture (Procedure 2014/0100(COD)) finally reauthorising sale and cultivation of farmers' seeds, after 40 years of prohibition. What farmers tried to achieve for 40 years, Carrefour thanks to its leadership power achieved in eight months. The European law will apply nationally from January 2021 but it can be expected that farmers will no longer be prosecuted in the meantime. A big win for the planet, the producers, the health of 500 million Europeans, and the health of future generations.
- **Brand image impact:** Carrefour's commitment for food quality and French agriculture was revealed in broad daylight. It changed people's opinion of the brand, with an 8pt increase in brand love following the campaign (from 65% to 73%, see fig.2). And for the first time since 2010, Carrefour surpassed its competitor Leclerc and became the preferred retailer of the French (*See fig.3*).

Fig.2

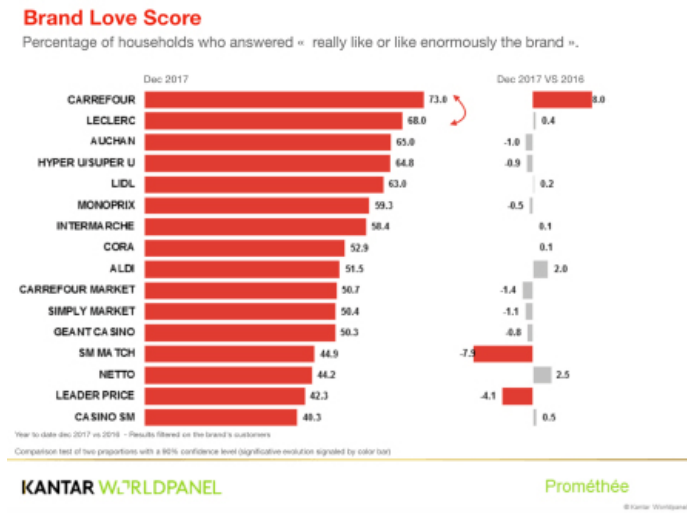


Fig.3

Preferred food retailer of the French

RANK	BRAND	SCORE
1	CARREFOUR	100
2	LECLERC	99
3	LIDL	86
4	AUCHAN	84
5	INTERMARCHÉ	82

Results from previous years:

Percentage of « I like » the brand on the last 4 study waves:

	2010	2012	2014	2017
Carrefour	75 %	67 %	66 %	68 %
Leclerc	70 %	68 %	67 %	67 %
Auchan	66 %	60 %	56 %	57 %

Following the Black Supermarket, people's opinions about Carrefour completely changed. For the first time, they had the impression that the big company was fighting on their side: *"Carrefour fights on the consumer's side... it's political, militant, brilliant"*. They thought it was a completely unexpected approach for a large retailer: *"It upsets the standards, it shocks, battles, it's about rebellion"*, *"Carrefour is Wonder Woman or Jose Bove (a famous ecologist activist in France), someone strong who says move, wake up"*, *"it is an avant-garde actor, responsible, who fights for us..."*, *"If they follow into this register, it can make me CHANGE my opinion..."*, *"It's a bit like the antithesis of the big retailer"*. (See fig.4)

Fig.4

Black Supermarket

A "Black Supermarket" initiative that has the merit of creating a new and engaging discourse in the profusion of discourses on quality. A message that values the local, the producers, the pleasure of forgotten vegetables and therefore the taste. A rebellious tone that surprises as a leader, but makes Carrefour more inclusive and committed to consumers.

An electroshock communication that awakens the interest of the interviewees and is well understood...

- A visual and sound aesthetic of a sensational video clip (codes inspired by the digital world, type Brut...)
- An atypical message, *"which surprises on the positive side"*
- A posture of association, of "class action" that takes the consumer's side - *"stands on our side"* -
- Valorizes forgotten, atypical vegetables, producers all in the service of **TASTE**



"Carrefour fights on the consumer's side... it's political, militant, brilliant..." "Reminds me of the story of ugly vegetables", "It upsets the standards, it shocks, battles, it's about rebellion" "you have to concentrate but it leads to reflection..." "Carrefour is Wonder woman or José Bové someone strong who says move, wake up", "he is an avant-garde actor, responsible, who fights for us..." "If they follow into this register, it can make me CHANGE my opinion..." "It's a bit like the antithesis of the big retailer",...



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III. Business outcomes

- **Commercial impact:** Consumers bought the illegal goods en masse in our stores, 70 tons around the time the law changed, and a total of 153 tons at the end of summer. But this sales measure does not represent the size of consumers' enthusiasm for these illegal produces because we were constantly out of stock. 153 tons was the maximum that was actually available from illegal producers, because of the illegal nature of produces. It drove instore traffic by 15% and in the end the entire produce section benefited from the halo effect as sales grew by 10% (See fig.5).

Fig.5

On a test sample of 15 stores from 20.09.2017 to 20.10.2017					
Store Format	% evolution traffic instore	Ratio of illegal produces to organic produces	Illegal sales (€)	Total of sales in Fruits and vegetables aisle - organic & non-organic (€)	% evolution of sales in the aisle
Carrefour "Bio" (100%organic) (10 stores)	115	22%	187013	850063	110
Carrefour Hyper (5 stores)	110	20%	23427	1952300	108

- **Long-term commercial and marketing impact:** The Black Supermarket has made it possible to create a proprietary range of organic produces made from farmers' seeds. A range of products that meets all the expectations of the consumer of today: richer in nutrients and in taste, better for the environment and people's health, destandardised, local, inherited from our ancestral agricultural heritage, with a strong link to small producers, and of course from organic farming. A proprietary range that met real commercial success over the long term. Between September 2017 and August 2018, we went from eight to 18 producers, from 13 to 21 varieties, from 43 tons to 153 tons sold (See fig.6).

Fig.6

Season	Number of producers	Number of Black Supermarket varieties	Quantity of Black Supermarket produces sold (tons)	Number of stores	
Autumn-Winter 2017-2018	8	13	43	80	Source: Matthieu LOVERY, Director of Fruit and Vegetables, Flowers and Plants
Spring-Summer 2018	18	21	110	400	
TOTAL at 08.2018	18	21	153	400	

- **Building a strong competitive advantage:** Through our action, we were able to build a strong network of loyal producers, loyal to the brand because we supported them when they were alone and their production was illegal. This network of farmers, and the offer of organic farmers' varieties they provide, is never seen before in Europe, and no other retailer can claim to have one. This gives us a considerable competitive advantage, particularly in the organic sector where retailers compete fiercely.

Today, as the law changed, the range was renamed from 'Black Supermarket' to 'Graines de Paysans', meaning 'farmers' seeds' (See fig.7). Our objective is to keep the range growing in number of producers and varieties, but also to extend it to other products, as farmers' bread and farmers' wine, two areas where farmers' varieties play a crucial role in product quality and terroir preservation in France.

Fig.7



IV. Corporate strategy impact

The Black Supermarket dramatically transformed the brand image externally but also internally. Carrefour stopped seeing itself as the big bad wolf, and started thinking that it could be the hero. In doing so, the campaign empowered Carrefour to move on to a more ambitious positioning for the company worldwide. Indeed, four months after the launch of the campaign, Alexandre Bompard, CEO of Carrefour, stated in its announcement to shareholders that the Black Supermarket inspired the company to position itself as the leader of the Food Transition worldwide, fighting for food quality worldwide. This declaration was enacted in September 2018 with the launch of a new corporate and global brand strategy in ten countries, entitled Act for Food. A new strategy that led to a 1.5pt increase in Carrefour's stock on the week of the announce, and still stable today. In the Act for Food platform, each campaign is an act for the worldwide food transition. The Black Supermarket was the first founding act of Act for Food.

Effects on the market

The campaign was a big commitment from Carrefour. It was the first time a retailer defied the law for good, with serious legal risks and exposure to agro-chemical lobbies, who were quick to retaliate. It sent strong signals and inspired the category:

- First, it revealed an issue that only militant farmers knew about, but which is now recognised by the public as critical to our environment and health.
- Second, it sent the signal to all actors of the agri-food industry (retailers, food companies, seed producers, farmers, consumers) that they have the responsibility to defend our agricultural biodiversity. It's part of our heritage, and if we don't preserve it, it will be lost forever for the next generation.
- Third, it showed that big brands like Carrefour have the power to change things, so they actually should. Against failing governments and unfair laws, businesses have the power to change things, through acts of rebellion, and mobilisation of their clients. And big brands should be the first to rebel.

The Black Supermarket became a benchmark for the category, that was quoted multiple times in the professional press like the Harvard Business Review.

A benchmark that inspired some agri-food players to emulate Carrefour. As Danone, and its CEO Emmanuel Faber, who declared "the world will only change if companies become activists", before he launched in September 2018, Danone's Green Friday: a day during which Danone donated all of their sales to initiatives that promote the deployment of new agricultural models.

A benchmark that inspired another French retailer, Auchan, which launched a new brand campaign one year after the Black Supermarket, entitled 'Auchan acts so that everything changes'.

How did this campaign push the boundaries of effective creativity?

A creative idea that proved big brands should be the first to rebel. First, it showed that big brands like Carrefour have the power to change things, so they actually should. Against failing governments and unfair laws, big businesses have the power to change things, through acts of rebellion and mobilisation of their clients. And big brands should be the first to rebel.

A creative idea that proved creativity can shape corporate strategy. This case study is not just the case study of a campaign, it is the case study of how a creative idea kick-started the transformation of Carrefour's worldwide corporate strategy. Indeed, the Black Supermarket dramatically transformed the brand image, not only externally but also internally. Carrefour stopped seeing itself as the big bad wolf, and started thinking that it could actually be the hero. In doing so, the campaign empowered Carrefour to move on to a more ambitious positioning for the company worldwide. Indeed, four months after the launch of the Black Supermarket, Alexandre Bompard, Carrefour's CEO, stated to shareholders that the Black Supermarket inspired the company to reposition as the leader of the Food Transition worldwide. In September 2018, it led to the launch of a new brand platform in ten countries, entitled 'Act for Food', generating a 1.5pt increase in Carrefour's stock on the first week, and still stable today. In the Act for Food platform, each campaign is an act for the worldwide food transition. The Black Supermarket, being the first founding act of Act for Food.

A creative idea that proved brave ideas can't be sold to clients but have to be made with them.

Creating the Black Supermarket was a very big commitment from Carrefour, which took a huge risk. So to make it happen we had to completely change the way we usually produce a campaign and collaborate with clients. It is not an idea that can be 'sold' to a client, it is an idea that must be designed and implemented 100% with them and their stakeholders (farmers, lobbyists, lawyers):

- **From the conception:** defining together the risk that we can afford to take, what we want to change in the law. We spent 50+ hours with lawyers specialised in European laws and Carrefour's lawyers.
- **To building a commercial offer from scratch:** we had to find and rally illegal producers, who were afraid to be found, and sign a stable supply contract with them for five years. Building a network of farmers is not originally an advertising agency job, but it's thanks to the militant creative concept that we were able to rally the farmers in the first place.
- **To the creative execution:** we wrote body copies with the farmers, to make sure the campaign would remain faithful to their words and to their fight, which they had been fighting for much longer than we had against lobbies.

Increasingly, the role of agencies will go beyond our traditional role of campaign providers, to accompany the client in these profound transformations that require bravery and therefore support. The Black Supermarket is a sign of this evolution.

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