

Unilever Tries to Corner 'Stock' Market

Once, it was fashionable for marketers of packaged foods to center their campaigns on brand characters like Betty Crocker, Martha White and Aunt Jemima. Today, Madison Avenue is following a new recipe.

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Multimedia



[New Knorr Ad](#)

Advertisers, inspired by the growing popularity of cooking shows on television, are increasing hiring real-life chefs to help peddle products. Among the culinary stars stepping outside the kitchen for marketing work are Paula Deen, Rocco DiSpirito, Guy Fieri and Emeril Lagasse.

To bring out a new product in the United States, Knorr, the giant food brand owned by [Unilever](#), is turning to the chef Marco Pierre White to be the linchpin of the campaign. Mr. White has already appeared in ads that introduced the product in more than 20 countries, including Britain and Canada.

In this country, the product — a concentrated stock sold in a four-pack of small tubs, each of which makes three and a half cups of broth — is called Knorr Homestyle Stock. Other names

in markets around the world include Knorr Stock Pot, Knorr Marmite de Bouillon and Knorr Bouillon Pur.

Mr. White, who became a celebrity chef in Britain, is featured in television commercials and online ads for Knorr Homestyle Stock. He is also making personal appearances for the product, which began at the BlogHer blogger conference in San Diego last month.

The campaign also includes a public relations effort, the distribution of samples in stores, cents-off coupons content on the Knorr [Web site](#) and a presence in social media [like Facebook and Twitter](#) .

Knorr is Unilever's largest single global brand and sells numerous products in the United States, among them side dishes, pasta sauces, gravies, dips, sauces and bouillon.

Yet there is no huge, category-dominating product under the Knorr umbrella that contributes to making the brand a big deal among American shoppers. Unilever is hoping that Knorr Homestyle Stock, along with another new Knorr product, Knorr Roasters, a seasoning blend for chicken, will raise the brand's profile.

Knorr is a brand "that has a lot of legs, that goes across a lot of categories," says Donna Barker, senior director of marketing for Knorr at Unilever United States in Englewood Cliffs, N.J.

But "we're not as well known as we could be in the United States," she adds.

That makes the introduction of Knorr Homestyle Stock "a very important launch for us," Ms. Barker says. "It is the start of what we want to do with Knorr in the United States."

The campaign will be the "biggest food launch" for Unilever in this country this year, she adds, and "one of the biggest launches for Unilever" over all.

Executives are optimistic about how Knorr Homestyle Stock will be received, Ms. Barker says.

"It's doing very well" in the countries in which it is already being sold, she adds.

"Penetration has been good, and repeat has been better." (By "repeat," she means repeat purchases.)

Another good sign for the new product in the United States, Ms. Barker says, is that "the response we have gotten from retailers" being asked to stock it "has been quite positive."

“We’re hoping it will bring fresh new energy to the category” of stocks and broths, she adds.

Knorr first developed Homestyle Stock “because research told us consumers are looking for value and convenience in putting meals on the table,” Ms. Barker says, particularly as the economy means they are eating out less and at home more.

Using the new product rather than making a stock from scratch is less time-consuming, she adds, and “results in a meal that’s tasty.”

“There’s value, flexibility, convenience and ease, wrapped up in this beautiful little tub,” she adds.

Mr. White was chosen for the campaign because he has been a Knorr “brand ambassador” since 2006, Ms. Barker says, and “tested exceptionally well with consumers.”

The initial commercial in the campaign, which is appearing on cable channels like Bravo, Food Network and TLC, is based on a commercial that has been used in other countries to introduce the product.

It has been “adapted to the United States,” Ms. Barker says, by featuring “dishes that would work” among consumers in this country who use the new stock, which comes in chicken and beef flavors. Among those dishes is one called lemon chicken primavera.

The commercial begins with Mr. White in a kitchen, chopping vegetables. In a voice-over, he says: “I cook for people with the most discerning tastes. It’s high pressure.”

“In my kitchen, the heart of a great dish is a great-tasting stock,” he continues. “New Knorr Homestyle Stock tastes like stock made from scratch.”

“It’s concentrated,” Mr. White says, “and like a good stock has just the right ingredients, simmered to perfection.”

(The free-standing inserts in newspapers carrying the cents-off coupons make similar points. “Discover a great-tasting stock, made with carefully selected ingredients, simmered to perfection,” the ad says. A photograph of Mr. White appears next to this quotation attributed to him: “The secret ingredient is Knorr Homestyle Stock. It does all the seasoning for you.”)

After Mr. White makes the spiel in the commercial, he pauses and says, “The food critics are still pretty tough, though.”

At that moment, he places the chicken dish he has been preparing in front of three people seated at a table in the kitchen: two boys and a girl. The boy tastes a bite, then nods his head.

(The children are meant to represent Mr. White's family; he has four children. The diners, however, are actors.)

The spot ends with an announcer declaring: "New Knorr Homestyle Stock. Tastes like stock made from scratch."

The commercial was originally created in 2008 by the London office of JWT, part of WPP. A year later, Knorr left JWT for Lowe & Partners Worldwide, part of the Interpublic Group of Companies, which has helped introduce the product to other markets.

Last year, Lowe Roche, the Lowe agency in Canada, adapted the commercial for the Canadian market. This year, Lowe Roche has adapted the spot for the United States.

"We've continued with the approach" developed by JWT, says Rebecca Morgan, managing partner for strategy at the London office of Lowe, known as DLKW Lowe.

Mr. White "fits the bill because of his authenticity," she adds, but even where he "isn't known as a chef, he's incredibly powerful on camera."

Mr. White appears in most new markets, although in some Knorr is using local chefs. For instance, in Spain, Jordi Cruz is the endorser.

The idea is to bring to the brand a quality "we talk about" as "chefmanship," Ms. Morgan says, "all in service of the home cook."

"It takes Knorr's understanding of the home cook, the time-pressured cook, and brings chefmanship to bear, tips they give you for making things easy," she adds.

The final segment of the commercial is meant to duplicate what Ms. Morgan calls "the acid test, that moment when" a meal is "dished up and the kids taste it, the husband tastes it."

Knorr Homestyle Stock is about making it "more guaranteed" that their verdict will be positive, she adds.

Showing Mr. White awaiting the opinion of the children tells viewers that, “yes, he’s this chef and food expert,” Ms. Morgan says, “but he’s this normal guy who knows about cooking for a family.”

“At the end of the day, it’s focused on who’s using it in the kitchen,” she adds.

The [British version](#) of the commercial has a slightly different ending from the American version.

Instead of the announcer repeating Mr. White’s line about how Knorr Homestyle Stock replicates stock made from scratch, Mr. White’s voice is heard, praising Knorr Stock Pot as “the best thing to happen to cooking since me.”

That ending was appropriate for British audiences, Ms. Morgan says, because Mr. White is well known to them for his “wry sense of humor.”

But to consumers who are less familiar with him, the joke can seem “arrogant,” she adds, so it was edited out.

“Horses for courses,” Ms. Morgan says, using the British expression that means what is suitable in one situation may not be in another.

The agencies working on the campaign include, in addition to Lowe, Mindshare, part of WPP, for media buying; Ogilvy Public Relations, part of the Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide unit of WPP, for public relations; the Ryan Partnership, for integrated promotional and digital marketing; Story Worldwide, for digital efforts; and Integrated Marketing Services, for shopper marketing.

The budget for Knorr Homestyle Stock represents “fresh new money” to advertise Knorr in the United States, Ms. Barker says, meaning the money is not being diverted from other Knorr or Unilever products.

The budget will be increased in 2012, she adds, although she declines to provide totals for either this year or next.

Unilever plans to spend 55 percent more to advertise all Knorr products in the United States this year than it did last year, Ms. Barker says, and “add another 25 percent” to the budget in 2012.

According to the Kantar Media unit of WPP, Unilever spent \$4.9 million last year to buy ads for Knorr food products in major media.

The brand's ad budget had yo-yoed in the years before that, Kantar Media reports, going from \$8.1 million in 2007 to \$1.1 million in 2008 and then \$7.1 million in 2009.

In the first quarter of this year, ad spending for Knorr was negligible, according to Kantar Media, totaling only \$133,000, compared with \$1.2 million in the same period of 2010.