

MG3020 Social Media Marketing & Communications
 Individual Project: L.L.Bean
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Part 1: Background Information

Company History

One hundred years ago Leon Leonwood (L.L.) revolutionized camping and hiking goods production and sales in the United States. What began as a personal quest for better hiking shoes turned into a national brand that still considers customer service and product quality most important in the company's values and goals. During the 1920s and 30s, L.L.Bean expanded from hiking boots to camping supplies and hiking gear, benefitting from the increased interest in the outdoors sweeping the nation. The Freeport ME store opened in 1917 and since 1951 has stayed open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and has no locks on the doors, giving its customers full attention and building a relationship of trust and reliability. L.L.Bean has continued to modernize over the years, incorporating technology to make production faster and lower the cost of its products; this included liquidated outlets and retail stores across the US and free shipping. Since the 1990s L.L.Bean has expanded internationally by opening stores in Japan and China and has developed a user-friendly and award winning website that generates most of the company's sales today. Just as the company evolved half a century earlier to market to its growing customer base, 2006 saw L.L.Bean evolve into a brand that upheld "green" building standards and values and, in 2010, brought out a new clothing line that catered to a fashion-forward modern audience that took a prominent place in the market.ⁱ Today, L.L.Bean sells a variety of products including:

- Casual for men, women, and children
 - Shirts, sweaters, blazers, sweatshirts, jackets, fleece tops
 - Trousers, jeans, skirts and dresses, shorts
 - Swimwear, pajamas and robes, accessories (belts etc.), socks, long johns
- Shoes: hiking, sneakers, boat shoes, slippers, moccasins, snow boots, rain boots, the L.L.Bean Boot
- Gear and clothing for: Hunting, fishing, winter sports, backpacking, cycling, workout, kayaking and canoeing, camping, accessories (sunglasses, hats etc.)
- Baggage: Backpacks, messenger bags, lunch boxes, tote bags, gear bags, waist packs, briefcases, duffels, luggage, travel toiletry bags
- Home goods: dog beds and supplies, bedding, outdoor furniture and accessories, bath products, rugs and mats

Company Values

Upon entering L.L.Bean's website, it is easy to see that the company wants to make the customer happy. "Shipped for free" and "Guaranteed to last" are phrases that continually appear on all parts of the website and print ads. In case anything is left unclear about their promise of "100% satisfaction guarantee – no time limit," L.L.Bean offers an explanation of their values, beginning with a quote from their founder: "Sell good merchandise at a reasonable profit, treat your customers like human beings and they will always come back for more."ⁱⁱ This is followed by their elaboration of their satisfaction guarantee and description of the company's customer-first policy in a concise bulleted format.

While the company provides clothes and equipment for those who explore the outdoors, it also as taken steps to preserve the environment its customers enjoy. Their website provides detailed information on its material use, recycled content and pollution prevention, awareness of climate change and the steps taken to build energy-conserving stores, transport and fuel use and packaging reduction, and the creation of organic and sustainable products. L.L.Bean also considers the community another key influence in their products and sales. The company provides funds for “local, state, regional, and national conservation organizations” and grants for “education, health and human services, and the arts and product donations. L.L.Bean takes community involvement a step further and offers programming for outdoor activities and lessons for all ages and interests.

This information is important to be aware of because it influences my own approach to creating a message for Irish consumers that is in agreement with the company’s previous statements or ad campaigns.

Part 2: Research

Market Assessment

While L.L.Bean has had its ups and downs over the decades, its most recent year-end report called 2012 a success and saw the company recovering from the recession with \$1.5 billion in revenueⁱⁱⁱ. According to a website traffic monitoring site, the company has a traffic net value of \$389,869, receives 178,002 in daily page views and makes \$534 in daily ad revenue^{iv}. In 2012 Leon Gorman, then chairman of L.L.Bean, was listed by ABC News as the richest man in Maine, with a net worth of \$860 million. Since then Shawn Gorman was elected chairman of the company in May 2013^v. Because L.L.Bean is a privately owned company it is not on the stock exchange.

L.L.Bean has won numerous awards over the years, including (but not limited to)^{vi}:

- Highest Ranking in Customer Satisfaction amongst online apparel retailers in 2012 by the J.D. Power 2012 Online Apparel Retailer Satisfaction ReportSM.
- Top three for five consecutive years for top-rated multichannel retailer in customer service by the National Retail Federation Foundation/American Express Customer Service Survey.
- 2010 Catalog of the Year in the Annual Multichannel Merchant Awards. L.L. Bean also received Cross Channel Merchant of the Year honors.
- llbean.com was placed among the top five Web sites for customer satisfaction and #1 in apparel by ForeSee E-Retail Satisfaction Index Survey.

Competitors

In the US, L.L.Bean has multiple competitors who sell outdoors and camping gear, but it is important to note that these companies (REI and Cabela’s, for example) sell other brands besides their own, like North Face jackets, Columbia sleeping bags etc. The only other company that is a direct rival to L.L.Bean in its own clothing brand and outdoor gear is Lands’ End.

Ireland has outdoors and camping stores like REI and Cabela’s, the most notable of which are 53 Degrees North, Great Outdoors, and Portwest, the latter carrying their own brand in addition to other major outdoor names.

53 Degrees North is an Irish company that has been on the market for over 20 years. It stocks apparel for every outdoor sport from all the major brands, such as “The North Face, Berghaus, Columbia, Lowa, Jack Wolfskin, Regatta, Craghoppers, Icebreaker, Merrell, Osprey, Deuter” and many others^{vii}. While the bulk of its sales comes from online, there are three stores located in Ireland: Blanchardstown, Carrickmines, and Cork. The company also offers bulk pricing to outdoor groups, expeditions, and educational groups. There is free shipping on orders of €49 to Ireland and the UK; other European countries have a €7.50 shipping rate. Similar to L.L.Bean they have a return policy, but there is only a 30 day window.

Great Outdoors was established in 1976 and has remained an Irish brand throughout the years. It has three separate shops in Dublin, one that carries the bulk of their products, another for watersports, and another for North Face products. The company website not only offers gear and clothing for diverse outdoor activities, but also advice for outdoor adventurers in Ireland and highlights athletes and staff who are dedicated to outdoors experiences. Great Outdoors has a similar shipping and return policy to 53 Degrees North, but it should be noted that it limits the return period to 21 days and higher shipping fees apply to everywhere except Ireland^{viii}.

Portwest is a much older company than 53 Degrees North or Great Outdoors, having passed its 100th birthday in 2004. There are two stores located in Dundalk and Galway and a factory shop in Westport. Portwest carries clothing for hiking, skiing, ocean sports, running and general workwear, along with camping products and shoes. The company’s own brand products are mainly in the workwear category, but also feature many sweaters and jackets, boots and shoe accessories, hats, and socks. Their return and shipping policies are also equivalent to 53 Degrees North (International shipping fees are determined by courier)^{ix}.

Consumers

While US consumers of L.L.Bean have remained consistent over the years, fitting into the Caucasian, East Coast, outdoors-y, 40-50 year age brackets, determining an Irish consumer base is a bit more complex. L.L.Bean’s casual clothing line may appeal to the style of 50-60 year olds here, but not their wallets. Likewise, the L.L.Bean Signature Collection would be very popular with 20-40 year olds, but again would be considered a luxury brand. While this may initially be disheartening, it should be kept in mind that with the economy on the rise, this could soon change and opening a store in Ireland would be a smart investment for the company. In the past five years there has been a surge in camping in Ireland, according to the *Irish Examiner*, a fact that should not be overlooked when L.L.Bean offers some of the greatest variety and best quality of gear^x.

With this information in mind, it would be best to market L.L.Bean camping and outdoor products to Irish consumers who are in that interest bracket, both in major population centers and the rural countryside. Casual clothing and the Signature line would be marketed to consumers in cities who may be interested in the outdoorsy-look, but prefer a bit of city-style, too. Overall, both sets of consumers would have interest in the environment, either its preservation or activities within it. Both sets of consumers would also value well-made clothing that, while it costs a little more, would last for many years and save money in the long run.

To gain a better understanding of an Irish consumer base, studies through netnography, website tracking, and surveys on college campuses and in shopping centers would be the most effective.

Part 3: Campaign Objectives and Planning

Campaign Objectives

There are two main objectives in launching L.L.Bean in Ireland. The first is to pick up a consumer base swiftly using strong theories of advertising. This means generating ads that directly promote outdoors equipment and clothing sales and encourage interest in viewers by facilitating in product trials and changing previous purchasing behavior from competitors. The main idea is to spread the word about L.L.Bean, creating a social buzz around the brand so that consumers no longer ask “What is it” but “Where can I get it.” The distribution of catalogues to more rural areas, placement of billboards in or around cities, and internet advertisements would be the first stage of fulfilling this objective. “Trunk” shows, trade shows, and campus displays of products would be the next stage in advertising the company, allowing potential customers to interact with the brand itself.

The second objective is to build on the now established consumer base, reminding consumers that L.L.Bean is still relevant even if it is no longer camping season – in other words, highlight the use of their casual clothing lines and home goods. At this point L.L.Bean would have a more accurate e-mail and address list from consumers (through trade shows etc) and could target its consumers accordingly. Ads would center on autumn or winter styles of clothing, evoking “cozy” or “heart-warming” emotions. As the seasons changed, so too would the ads. Winter and spring would ring in emphasis on the Signature Collection clothing line, aimed at young adults who are starting or are already well established in their professional careers.

Budget

A budget for launching this campaign could draw its initial estimate from similar campaigns produced in the US. Ad expenses not only include the cost of the materials used for billboards, catalogues, and banners for campus events, but also hours worked by production teams, postage costs, and product cost (to name a few). Other influencing factors contingencies, the market potential and size, and the occurrence or prolonging of economic recession. By using social media and word of mouth to enhance the print ads and more traditional aspects of the campaign, costs can be reduced as the consumer is effectively advertising the brand by retweeting, reblogging, and/or sharing media on YouTube and Facebook. Overall, the factor that determines whether the campaign is a success or flop is if sales of products exceed the cost of the entire campaign. The company

Planning

In constructing a plan for an L.L.Bean ad campaign, it is important to establish an effective approach to the target audience’s attitude and personal values. In this case, the attitude sequence that would best benefit L.L.Bean’s perception would be cognitive, affective and conative. As mentioned previously, L.L.Bean would focus on spreading knowledge of their products first through catalogue distribution and more aggressive ads, followed by instilling brand values and creating an emotional bond with consumers through testing of the product ad discounts on early purchases, thereby fulfilling both the cognitive and affective aspects of appealing to customer attitudes. Finally, L.L.Bean would shape the consumer’s behavior by repositioning the brand as a long-term commitment to the customer rather than seasonal purchases, producing the conative effect.

L.L.Bean has established a brand narrative in the States that has attracted a loyal consumer base with similar personal values to potential Irish consumers. These values include: interest in the outdoors, experiencing and preserving nature, emphasis on quality versus quantity, a professional & sophisticated style, practical and comfortable clothes, getting the most for their money, and enjoying time with others (family or social groups). The trends that affect the Irish consumer base for L.L.Bean correlate to their personal values: active lifestyles, enjoying the outdoors, protecting the environment (or, enjoying the environment L.L.Bean protects), young professionals.

Within the campaign itself, the segmentation of consumers would fall into three main categories: Age, activity interest, and gender. Consumers between the ages of 20-40 and both genders would be targeted based on their interest in outdoor activities; women within that age bracket would be separately targeted for the Signature Collection based on interest in stylish and professional clothing. The 40-60 age group of both genders, but primarily women, would be targeted based on interest in comfortable clothes and home life and less intensive outdoors activities. These segmented groups all share a common interest in saving money by obtaining a product that would last several years and would be targeted accordingly. Positioning L.L.Bean in the minds of these consumers involves well-timed ads that coincide with seasonal outdoor activities, but later builds on the increased interest in use of the brand as personal style choice. Please see the following page for a timeline of the proposed campaign that more clearly illustrates the segmentation, targeting, and positioning.

Timeline of Campaign

* = Social Media Campaign

August through September – Photo shoots in Ireland for print ads and website product photos (autumn and spring clothing; outdoor activities); Test camping products with Irish consumer focus groups to generate reviews/opinions of products to place on website

December through January – Photo shoots for print ads and website products (winter clothing; outdoor activities)

Mid-March – Launch print (billboards) and web ads

- *Launch Irish website
- *Start use of Irish Twitter, Facebook, FourSquare

April – Send out catalogues to rural areas; Trade shows in Dublin, Cork, and Galway

- Offer free shipping from US through May
- *Start use of Pinterest, YouTube

Mid-late April through May – Hold campus events at UCC, NUI Galway, Trinity College, University Limerick^{xi}

- These would include: Clothing and gear on display on main quad and/or the gym, testing of equipment at the gym (hiking, rock climbing, etc), sale of small products (water bottles etc.), written promo/interview with rep in student newspapers, offers of outdoor events to student groups, email signups, flyer distribution
- *Start use of blog in late May, introducing the writer, his interests, hobbies, connection with the outdoors etc.

June through August – Continue promotion of brand by sponsoring outdoor events; Link L.L.Bean with Irish National Park and Wildlife Services; Continue vigorous ads of outdoor gear and clothing

- *Blog used to highlight product use in camping, hiking, biking, kayaking, canoeing, general outdoors activities
- *YouTube channel features videos from blog and Irish musicians performing
- *Tweet about connection with NPWS, publish feature post on blog, create photo albums and announcements on Facebook displaying the event
- *Continue using Pinterest, create different boards for different outdoor activities and adventures

End of August – Start promotion of autumn casual clothing line; Promote Bean Boots! Send out autumn catalogue and emails advertising autumn clothing

- Offer discounted shipping through September
- *Guest writers on blog share stories that link to clothing lines (jobs, family etc.)
- *Continue using Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest to showcase new styles and clothing

Mid-late September – Hold campus events that focus on casual Signature clothing line

- Highlight sales within Signature Collection (coincides with graduation times)

- *YouTube clips of Signature Collection in use (similar to slice of life ad)
- *Tweet about events on campus, create special hashtag, link to University Twitters
- *Create Signature collection board on Pinterest

September through mid November – Continue promoting autumn clothing; Highlight winter sports gear and apparel; Host events in National Parks near Galway and Dublin (hiking, camping weekends)

- *Continue to use all social media sites
- *Guest bloggers and interviews in October to keep consumers interested

Mid November through December – Start Christmas promotions and ads; Cyber-Monday promotion

- Offer discounted shipping for the month of December
- *YouTube videos of musicians playing Christmas music
- *Create Pinterest boards of Christmas gear & winter apparel
- *Tweet about Christmas gear and apparel

January through February – Sponsor winter sporting events at universities; Push Bean Boots again

- *Blog features winter sports/product guide; possibly guest writer who's a winter athlete

March – Shower, rinse, and repeat

Part 4: Application and Implementation

Creative Brief

To Americans, L.L.Bean is associated with quality, both in the products and the services provided by the brand. The goal of any ad produced for the Irish market would be to convince Irish consumers of the same. However, as previously detailed above, focusing on an emotional appeal based on consumer activities featuring L.L.Bean's products is more effective in creating initial brand awareness. The ad must catch the consumer's eye and make them think about becoming a person who uses L.L.Bean products because 1) They are an active person and enjoy outdoor activities 2) They want to get involved in outdoor activities 3) They like the idea of being an active outdoorsman, but prefer to simply give a visual effect of being active. The consumers have to believe that L.L.Bean is superior its competitors, so the ad also has to offer something that appeals to users of different brands, such as a sale or free shipping or online testimonials. The ads should also provide some link to social media, either by including a hashtag for Twitter or a thumbs-up "like" on Facebook, so the consumers can immediately start to interact with the brand and generate a buzz themselves.

To fulfill the second object outlined earlier in this project, L.L.Bean would approach consumers with a more rational appeal: Continue to use our brand because you've been pleased with it in the past. In order to accomplish this, the consumers have to be reminded of their emotional bond with the brand. This could be done with either statistics or a visual image of a happy user of the products, or the introduction of new products that are linked to previous successes with consumers. Building upon the consumer's trust and positive recall is essential in this ad. The products that would be advertised more heavily are the Signature Collection, casual clothing lines, and home goods. This is where the emphasis on quality versus quantity comes in, appealing to consumers who understand the value of well-made products that last a lifetime. It should be noted that women segmented into age groups 20-40 and 40-60 are the target audience for this ad.

Company Use of Social Media

As previously mentioned, L.L.Bean has moved on from a simple catalogue and print ads in magazines and incorporated social media into its marketing campaigns. The company primarily uses three of the four zones of social media channels: community, publishing, and commerce. L.L.Bean's Twitter broadcasts product use, sales, and increase customer interaction. Similarly, their YouTube channel and Pinterest board allows brand users to express interest in products, share opinions with other brand users and non-users, and promote the company's involvement within the community, whether that be in the recent Red Sox World Series commemoration boots, or a summer concert series of featured artists performing in Freeport. L.L.Bean also uses Google+ and Foursquare for networking and interaction with customers and showcases a blog that incorporates product use and customer stories for greater company appraisal.^{xii}

Because L.L.Bean has already been using social media effectively in the United States, it would be very easy to build on their previous efforts by orienting their social media sites directly towards the Irish customer. L.L.Bean's website would highlight clothes that are more suitable for Irish weather (rain gear, boots, sweater etc.), with models posing in the Irish countryside or hiking and camping in iconic Irish locations. The YouTube channel would feature Irish artists, like *Raglans*, *Hal* or *The Script*. Pinterest and Twitter would be used to display products in use,

camping, hiking, biking, kayaking etc., and Twitter would specifically target questions and user involvement at Irish Twitterers. An Irish blog would also be set up, following the adventures of outdoorsmen and women taking advantage of the Irish National Parks. To stimulate sales of casual clothing and the Signature collection, guest bloggers would be welcome to talk about their interest in the clothing line and success with home products.

Communication Mix

All aspects of social media mentioned above would be rolled out simultaneously to create a synchronized campaign that best serves the brand and consumers. While it wouldn't be a bombardment of information, because that seems a bit tacky for L.L.Bean, well placed ads and promotions on the internet and public spaces would correlate to use of social media. Please see the previous page of the campaign timeline for the implementation of social media platforms.

Print Ad

Please see attached ad.

Two Other Communication Methods

The other two communication methods best supporting the IMC campaign are direct marketing and sponsorship of Ireland's National Parks and Wildlife Services. Direct marketing consists of email newsletters and sale notifications, and banners and flyers distributed on campuses. Sponsoring the NPWS alerts customers that L.L.Bean respects the environment it makes its products for, which helps establish an emotional bond with the brand. This action also lives up to L.L.Bean's brand values and tenants of building and working with the community. These two methods aid the campaign by first enhancing brand awareness and positioning L.L.Bean in the forefront of consumer's minds. Second, they keep the company in good standing with consumers and reinforce the message that L.L.Bean isn't just about selling products but truly places value in the consumer and the community. Please see the above timeline for implementation of these methods.

Part 5: Campaign Evaluation and Future Goals

Goal Evaluation

Overall, this campaign would have fulfilled the objectives stated earlier. Brand awareness would be met and hopefully increase over the year long campaign. L.L.Bean would give their competitor's a run for their money by drawing customers away and attracting new ones with their lifetime guarantee and discounted shipping offers. It is not likely the budget would be overspent, given that this is a conservative campaign with few extraneous resources.

Next Stage of Development

It would be my hope that after L.L.Bean had a firm foothold within the outdoors bracket of consumers, that the company could open a retail store first in Dublin and later in Cork. It would also be beneficial to host more events in the National Parks on a larger scale, expanding their sponsorship of outdoor and environmental organizations.

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Bibliography and Endnotes

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- ⁱⁱ http://www.llbean.com/customerService/aboutLLBean/company_values.html?nav=ln
- ⁱⁱⁱ Richardson, Whit. 8th March, 2013. "L.L.Bean posts \$1.5 Billion in 2012 revenue, pays out employee bonuses." *Bangor Daily News*. <http://bangordailynews.com/2013/03/08/business/l-l-bean-posts-1-5b-in-2012-revenue-pays-out-employee-bonuses/>
- ^{iv} <http://www.freewebsitereport.org/www.llbean.com>
- ^v Kim, Susanna. 4th October, 2012. "The Wealthiest Person in Each State." *ABC News*. <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/richest-person-state/story?id=17543520#.UlgKT674Igo>
- ^{vi} See link for i endnote as source for awards.
- ^{vii} <http://www.53degreesnorth.ie/about>
- ^{viii} The information in this section is from the About Us, Outdoor Advice, Athletes and Expeditions, and Store Locator tabs on the following link:
<http://www.greatoutdoors.ie//index.php>
- ^{ix} <http://www.portwest.ie/storefront/content.aspx?idcontent=1>
- ^x Multiple contributing authors. 20th June, 2012. "Room with a view: Why camping out is 'in' for the Irish." *Irish Examiner*. <http://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/room-with-a-view-why-camping-out-is-in-for-the-irish-198004.html>
- ^{xi} Silverstein, Barry. 26th March, 2010. "New L.L.Bean Signature Collection Targets Younger Audience." *Brandchannel*. <http://www.brandchannel.com/home/post/2010/03/26/New-LL-Bean-Signature-Collection-Targets-Younger-Audience.aspx>
A freshman at Bates College in the US collaborated with L.L.Bean to promote their Signature Collection on campus when it was launched in 2010. I think it is a brilliant idea and his techniques could be used in Ireland to effectively reel in an audience interested in practical style and professionalism.
- ^{xii} http://www.llbean.com/customerService/aboutLLBean/social_media.html?nav=ln