

# BRANDWEEK

## Spotlight

### Heritage Brands To Get Wake Up Call, But Will Anybody Care?



*By Mike Beirne  
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Years ago, when he was on the Tylenol account, Paul Earle's mission was to push Nuprin off store shelves.

Later, Earle got Nuprin back onto shelves at CVS, but a lot has changed between now and then. For one, Earle left Saatchi & Saatchi in New York and founded River West Brands, a Chicago firm that tries to resurrect old brands.

River West snapped up Nuprin after Bristol-Myers Squibb discontinued the pain reliever in 2001. Now the name, once marketed as a "little, yellow, different" pill, is being slapped on a number of products ranging from a sore throat spray to a nasal decongestant inhaler to an arthritis cream.

Next up is Brim, the coffee brand that faded from retail a decade ago and hasn't been supported with ads for 15 years, though most people over 30 still recall the "Fill it to the rim with Brim" tagline. Next year, Earle will try to revive Bonwit Teller, the women's apparel retailer that closed its doors during the 1990s, and is flirting with bringing back an unnamed national beer brand.

If reviving brands was easy, everyone would do it, but it's not and many have failed trying—Bromo Seltzer anyone? But Earle is not deterred. "A good brand may hibernate, but it never dies," he said. And Earle has a decent track record, which includes giving Coleco, Soho Natural Soda, Metrecal diet drink and Structure, Sears' house apparel brand, the Frankenstein treatment.

People who specialize in brand resurrection say there's an art to it. "You need to find a brand that has more than heritage or recall with consumers," said Jeffrey Himmel, chairman and CEO of the Himmel Group, a New York firm that brought back Ovaltine Chocolate Drink Mix, Doans Pills, Gold Bond Medicated Foot Powder and Breck Shampoo, to name a few. "Any brand has to answer the question from the consumer of 'What's in it for me?'"

Earle searches for brands that disappeared through no fault of their own, like as part of a buyout, for instance. He's particularly interested in names that have been gone long enough that consumers remember the brand's positive character if not the product attributes.

His plan for Brim is to use the well-known tag on POP, when the reformulated and redesigned product appears early next year. Earle did not divulge details in regard to Bonwit Teller, but said it will not return as a chain of stores. Licensing the brand for accessories or handbags is a possibility.

Will it fly? Marketing gurus say the trick is to update the brand for a new audience.

"In cases where a brand has strong equity there is an opportunity to get a strong head start but you always have to find a story that is relevant and differentiated to make sure you have a product that is really going to last," said David Gaglione, associate director at Landor, New York.

As for Brim, Claude Singer, a partner at Lippincott Mercer, New York, said most people who remember the brand have a relatively positive association, but that doesn't mean they'll want to buy it.

"You can say Brim is a nice name, but you really will have trouble revising the original themes and the messages of [the] Brim brand and making anything of it today," said Singer. "Our sense of humor and culture moved on. You're not going to have 'Don't squeeze the Charmin' or 'Plop, plop, fizz, fizz.' They're wonderful associations from childhood, but they're not necessarily bankable."

Earle said he understands the challenge, but found inspiration in an unlikely place: politics.

"Brands provide a story to tell. The brand is all about the narrative. American culture today is a narrative culture," said Earle. "If a brand has a story and can prove itself, it's kind of like a candidate running for office. Candidates with a better track record tend to get the nod."