

As Liquid Death, a canned water brand known for its bold marketing, sustainable packaging, and recognizable brand identity, continues to grow, the company must define its ideal target audience, determine product expansion goals, and continue to establish itself as an enduring brand in its industry. Its market, “Bottled (and Canned) Water,” is well saturated by established players, with brands like *Aquafina* and *Dasani* each representing over 5% of the market share, respectively. While the market is competitive, it is also unmistakably important in the everyday lives of consumers; to have a secure position in an essential market, such as water, ensures long-term market share and financial success for any brand.

Liquid Death has strategically aligned themselves with various levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: addressing physiological needs through water, creating conversation and connecting fans of the brand socially, and supporting self-actualization by promoting eco-conscious consumer habits. These strengths, as well as their strong brand identity and voice, set them apart. Their “edginess” is a key identifier of their product and marketing voice but can also come across as potentially offensive to more conservative consumers (ex. the “sell your soul” campaign). Additionally, Liquid Death prices their 12-pack higher than standard household bottled water brands, while the price of single cans are relatively similar to competitors. Because the cans are larger than most bottled water offerings, and because cans cannot be resealed, storing unfinished water can become inconvenient for consumers.

DECISION CRITERIA:

- Liquid Death must continue to be a CPG brand that provides excellent products while caring for the environment.
- Liquid Death must engage their targeted audience in a way that is honest to their branding and relatable for their consumer.
- Liquid Death must be recognizable as an evergreen water brand.

DECISION ALTERNATIVES:

- Liquid Death could position themselves more broadly, focusing marketing efforts towards new consumers, specifically in sober communities (ex. expecting parents, alcoholics, religious communities). This would enable higher recognition of the brand among a wider variety of consumers, however could negatively impact the current positioning and verbiage represented in the marketing copy and branding.
- Liquid Death could expand its consumer base by prioritizing community-focused events and attracting like-minded consumers who resonate with the brand’s existing fans. This option holds risk, as it may be a costlier marketing strategy. However, this could strengthen brand loyalty and ultimately reduce marketing costs, since retaining repeat consumers is an economically efficient approach.
- Liquid Death could capitalize on its established consumer base, sticking with its bold marketing strategies while expanding its product line to better serve loyal fans. This would enable clear understandings for the brand and its consumer base of who they are and what can be expected from the brand while allowing for growth moving forward.

There are a variety of pros and cons to each “Decision Alternative,” presenting an opportunity to achieve the goals outlined in “Decision Criteria.” Brand recognition and becoming a household name should remain a key component of Liquid Death’s marketing strategy moving forward; on the surface, it seems advantageous to more broadly position the brand to increase the serviceable available market. Liquid Death’s creative positioning as an “extreme” brand has set them apart from their competitors, offering a clear, distinguishable trait in an otherwise hard-to-compare market. To best market themselves to *some* sober communities,

religious communities in particular, Liquid Death would have to compromise on their edgier statements, as the brand in its current form could offend more religious consumers. Liquid Death is proud to market to their alternative and creatively distinguished audience, not desiring recognition as a mainstream product. With this in mind, they should not compromise their brand to become more “culturally acceptable.” There are a wide variety of consumers that have already taken an interest in Liquid Death with their current positioning, defined as “proudly not for everyone.” Thus, Liquid Death should not alter their current targeting and positioning, retaining their current image as a brand that provides excellent products while caring for the environment.

As the brand hopes to expand its serviceable available market, one way to achieve this is to provide unique and exclusive consumer experiences. Mike Cessario, founder of Liquid Death, has expressed a desire to make Liquid Death “the Red Bull of water,” continuing the brand’s upward trajectory by pairing it with an entertainment facet that could draw more consumers and raise awareness. While this would engage their target audience in a way that stays true to the brand’s identity, I believe more should be done to establish Liquid Death as an evergreen water brand before they cross markets and promote their products in this way. By prioritizing their positioning as entertainment focused, they could easily lose sight of their goal to first and foremost be a recognizable eco-friendly product. Liquid Death has already experimented with this style of customer engagement, including their “Liquid Death Country Club.” While this can certainly be advantageous to the brand, and potentially increase the serviceable obtainable and available markets, I believe focusing too heavily on entertainment rather than product quality this early in the brand’s life cycle is the wrong time to blur the lines between the entertainment and CPG aspects.

Alternatively, Liquid Death has the option to maintain their targeting and positioning while expanding their current offerings. Their consistently authentic brand personality has already attracted a wide variety of interested and loyal consumers, even including children, who make up a “non-trivial share” of Liquid Death consumers. While keeping their current marketing strategies, I would propose that Liquid Death expand their offerings. To address a current consumer pain point of “saving a drink for later,” I suggest that Liquid Death develop a resealable recyclable bottle, such as aluminum, to address current consumer pain points. This alternative allows them to best take care of their current serviceable obtainable market as well as provide entry points for consumers in their serviceable available market who may be brought into that obtainable market through a pain point solution. Additionally, this allows them to maintain their recognizable brand voice, create loyal consumers, and cement their status as an eco-conscious brand. Once this foundation is solid, only then would I suggest moving further into experience-based marketing.

Liquid Death quickly rose to recognition among competitors, and to keep their competitive edge against new entrants, they must ensure their current consumer base remains loyal and consistent. The brand did not expect such positive results at its inception, and if they act too quickly, they risk endangering the admiration of the audience they have already acquired. As previously stated, Liquid Death holds a competitive advantage in the market by appealing to multiple needs represented in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Moving forward, Liquid Death’s ability to maintain brand authenticity while scaling their products to the various needs of their consumers will determine their positioning as either a cultural trend or an evergreen household name: one that creates excellent products, markets relationally towards their target consumer, and prioritizes environmental responsibility through eco-conscious packaging.