

Laser

'How advertising convinced Irish consumers of a better way to pay'.

INTRODUCTION / MARKETING BACKGROUND

In 1996 the leading banks and building societies combined to launch the country's first debit card, Laser, following a successful regional test in 1995. Debit cards had existed for a number of years in other European countries, but the concept was totally new and, therefore, required careful explanation to Irish consumers.

The participating institutions had selectively offered their current account-holders information on Laser through direct mail in the first half of 1996. In August, Irish International were appointed to handle the broader consumer launch of the card.

The Laser card works like an electronic cheque. When a person purchases goods / services at selected outlets, the cashier 'swipes' the card through their terminal, providing a receipt for the card-holder to sign. The payment is then debited from his or her account within a couple of days.

Laser, therefore, is a cheque replacement mechanism, with transactions being cheaper and swifter. However, it needed also to be positioned as a more controllable alternative to credit cards and a more secure payment method than cash.

THE MARKETING OBJECTIVES

Each element of Irish International's campaign had to play its role in highlighting Laser's unique strengths (e.g. security, speed, control, etc.) and position it as "the better way to pay". In achieving this, the agency was also acutely aware of the potential consumer negatives, including

confusion with the debit card concept, in-grained resistance to 'plastic cards' and general inertia or apathy.

The last plastic card system to be launched in Ireland were ATM cards (Banklink, Pass, etc.) back in 1978. It had taken 18 years for penetration of these cards to reach 36% of adults (an average of 55,000 per annum); while credit cards, launched in Ireland in the early 70's, had still only a penetration of 18% of adults by the end of 1997. The Laser card target, however, was more ambitious. It was hoped to have 200,000 active card-holders and some 300,000 transactions per month carried out on the new card by the end of 1996 and also to have 4,000 retailers accepting Laser.

THE ADVERTISING STRATEGY

The advertising needed to clearly and concisely communicate the specific benefits of Laser and do this in a manner that was distinctive, approachable and down-to-earth. It also needed to create a unique brand identity and personality for Laser - which up to then was a name that was appended to everything from kitchen knives to electrical retailers.

Impact was vital, not just because Laser was another new product launch, but more because it was another new product launch in the highly-cluttered financial services arena, where almost £17m had been spent on media in the preceding 12 months alone.

The core creative idea was designed to help Laser forge its own brand identity quite independently of its host financial institutions. As the tone of the message had to be lively, charming



Client:
Laser Card Services

Agency:
Irish International

Team:
Peter McPartlin,
Dave McGloughlin,
Ray Stevenson,
Marius Herbert

and accessible (and also because the actual Laser card design varied from one institution to another), the agency chose an animation style for TV which was then echoed in other media.

“Waltz through your day with Laser. The better way to pay.” became the central message, featuring on TV, a couple moving effortlessly through a typical shopping trip, thanks to their Laser card.

THE MEDIA STRATEGY

It was clear from the original brief that awareness-generation was not the only task facing media. TV might accomplish this quite easily, but the more precise benefits of Laser, how the card worked and the need to put the card “in danger of being used” at key shopping opportunities, also needed to be addressed. It was agreed that the core target audience should be 25 - 55 year old ABC1’s.

The various strands of the media mix and their individual roles were as follows:

TRADE PRESS: A pre-launch campaign to retailers in the grocery, restaurants and DIY sectors to promote card acceptance.

RTE TV: A programme-led buying strategy based on careful analysis of ABC1 adults viewing preferences.

NATIONAL PRESS: A selection of ‘ABC1 oriented’ titles carrying two ‘page-killer’ sizes specifically developed to exploit the opportunity provided by Christmas shopping and the January sales. In addition, smaller sizes were developed to add frequency around the main Christmas shopping features.

POSTERS: A range of sizes were used to target card-holders at appropriate times / locations, including DART cards aimed at city commuters and 6-sheets hand-picked at shopping centres where Laser was accepted.

RADIO: Promoting usage of the card amongst younger ABC1’s was particularly important. A separate radio commercial was created for the

main local stations in the prime Laser centres of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.

Creating ‘stand out’ amongst the clutter of financial services advertising was an underlying requirement of the Laser media strategy. Irish International developed two media firsts for Laser. The agency’s media research indicated that the Irish Times was the key newspaper for targeting the likely ‘early adopters’ of Laser. With the co-operation of the newspaper, the agency took over its heavily-read Personal Column page on launch day with a series of Laser card ‘footsteps’ and ‘earspaces’.

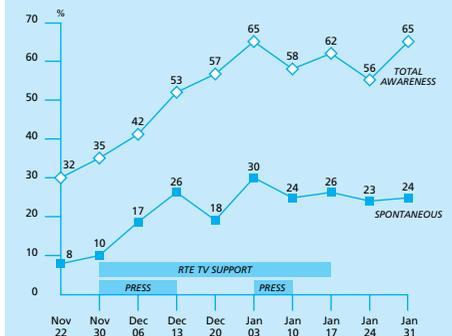
Targeting potential users during the January sales was also vital. Posters were an obvious choice, but many of the newer shopping centres (e.g. Jervis Street, Stephens Green, etc.) lacked appropriate sites. In conjunction with PML, the agency developed new poster panels (DART card size) within the lifts delivering a captive audience of shoppers to and from the car parks.

THE RESULTS

The performance of the Laser campaign was continuously monitored through tracking research conducted by Business & Market Research (BMR).

Chart 1
LASER - ADVERTISING AWARENESS:

November 1996 - January 1997
Bank Account Holders : 25 - 55 Yrs.



Source: BMR Ltd.

It was evident from this that the two lead media (TV and National Press) were working, as planned, in a complementary way. RTE was generating the strongest overall awareness, but highest amongst younger and working-class adults. Press awareness in contrast, was biased towards older and ABC1 adults, with radio and posters also fulfilling their individual roles.

Overall, the research showed that the campaign had a significant effect on Laser brand awareness, particularly amongst its core audience, with the 'convenience' and 'safety' benefits of the card directly attributable to the advertising. More importantly, it helped translate this awareness into

average card usage (+67%) and transaction volumes (+17%), as the following figures show. (Chart 2)

Crucially though, the total investment in advertising of £330,000 in 1996 yielded a substantial financial return for the participating institutions. Some £42m of retail sales were transacted through Laser between November 1996 - January 1997. Some of this would presumably have occurred anyway, without the aid of advertising. In an effort to calculate the 'natural' Laser transaction value in that period and to help isolate the advertising contribution, we have used the CSO's retail sales indices for all retail outlets in the Republic. (Chart 3)



Chart 2

LASER CARD / USAGE RESULTS : 1996

	Target Base (1996)	Pre-Advertising (At Oct '96)	Post-Advertising (At Jan '97)
Laser Cards Issued	200,000	125,000	215,000 (+7.5%)
No. of Outlets	4,000	3,500	4,500 (+12.5%)
Transactions Per Month	300,000	152,000	351,000 (+17%)
Avg. Card Usage Per Annum	12	15	20 (+67%)

Source: Laser Scheme

Chart 3

RETAIL SALES INDEX VS. LASER TRANSACTION VALUE

Period	Retail Sales Index	Avg. Laser Trans. Value Per Month	Total Value
April - October '96	100	£1,714,000	£12.0m*
November '96	102	£1,748,000	£1.75m
December '96	102	£1,748,000	£1.75m
January '97	105	£1,800,000	£1.80m
<i>Total Laser Transaction Value, April 1996 - January 1997</i>			
	Excluding Advertising Effect		£17.3m
	Including Advertising Effect		£54.0m

Advertising's Financial Contribution

£36.7m

Source: Retail sales data from the Central Statistics Office.

* £12m = £1,714,000 x 7 Months.

“Raising brand awareness was arguably the easy part, but getting so many people to use their Laser Cards, so regularly, within such a short period of time, was an achievement only distinctive advertising could do.”

Julie Jones,
Laser Card,

By applying the Retail Sales Index to Laser’s average transaction value between April - October 1996, we arrive at a logical estimate of the likely transaction amounts between November 1996 - January 1997.

The net contribution of advertising to Laser ‘sales’ was therefore £36.7m - a staggering 10-fold return on the initial investment of £330,000.

CONCLUSIONS

As a new product there is no doubt that Laser began its life with a head-start, e.g. wide distribution, product simplicity, convenience, etc. However, advertising certainly provided a catalyst for pushing take-up levels and usage well beyond original expectations, particularly in a sector where Irish people are innately cautious about money and the use of ‘plastic’.

Advertising has continued to be used in support of the Laser Card brand during 1997 and 1998, again with spectacular results. (Chart 4)

- In line with the 1998 advertising objectives, usage of the card has been broadened beyond simple payment for groceries to increased use for petrol, clothing, meals and household appliances.

As Julie Jones, the client on Laser Card, acknowledged:

“Raising brand awareness was arguably the easy part, but getting so many people to use their Laser Cards, so regularly, within such a short period of time, was an achievement only distinctive advertising could do.”

LAUNCHING LASER CARD - SUMMARY

Laser, Ireland’s first debit card, was launched by the ten leading banks and building societies in early 1996. Irish International were appointed to undertake a consumer education and awareness campaign from November 1996.

The initial targets for Laser were ambitious - 200,000 active card-

Chart 4

LASER CARD USAGE RESULTS: 1997 / 1998

Post Advertising Phases

	Phase 1 (At Jan '97)	Phase 2 (At May '97)	Phase 3 (At May '98)
Laser Cards Issued	215,000	280,000	490,000
No. of Outlets	4,500	6,400	10,500
Transactions Per Month	351,000	580,000	1,300,000
Avg. Card Usage Per Annum	20	25	31
Monthly Transaction Value	£14m	£23m	£52m

Source: Laser Scheme

According to tracking research conducted by Lansdowne over that period of time:

- Laser now has the same top-of-mind brand awareness as Mastercard and Amex and three times that of Diners Club.
- Ownership and usage of the card itself now exceeds that of Access / Mastercard, Amex and Diners combined.

holders, 300,000 transactions per month and 4,000 participating retailers - particularly given the relatively low penetration of credit cards and Irish people’s traditional cautiousness in relation to ‘plastic’ cards.

The agency needed to develop advertising that would not only communicate the benefits of Laser, but also create a brand personality and ‘stand out’ amongst the £17m of

'advertising clutter' spent annually within the financial services sector.

The first phase of the "Waltz through your day with Laser" campaign ran across a variety of media including TV, Newspapers, Radio and Outdoor from November 1996 to January 1997.

Tracking research quickly registered strong spontaneous and total awareness levels amongst the core

audience of 25 - 55 year old ABC1's. More importantly, awareness was being translated into card transaction volumes (+17% above target) and high average usage levels (+67%). The financial pay-off on Laser's £330,000 investment in this first advertising phase was spectacular, with £36.7m worth of additional transactions attributable to the campaign's impact - a 110-fold return on investment.



THE SURVIVORS GUIDE TO THE JANUARY SALES

FROM LASER - THE BETTER WAY TO PAY

The secret to surviving the sales is simple. Before you ever contemplate the crush, make sure you're properly equipped. The lady on the left may look fit for the battle of the bargains.

But the lady on the right is much more flexible financially. With her Laser card at the ready she can't put a foot wrong.

Laser is the new debit card service from Ireland's leading financial institutions. Using Laser is much easier than writing a cheque and it cuts down on the need to carry cash. Swipe the card. Sign the slip.

And well, that's it really. The amount is charged to your bank or building society account within a couple of days and your Laser transactions are detailed on your regular statement to help you keep in step with your finances.



THE LASER WAY.



ONE WAY.

Laser can be used at supermarkets, petrol stations, restaurants, department stores and a host of other retail outlets.

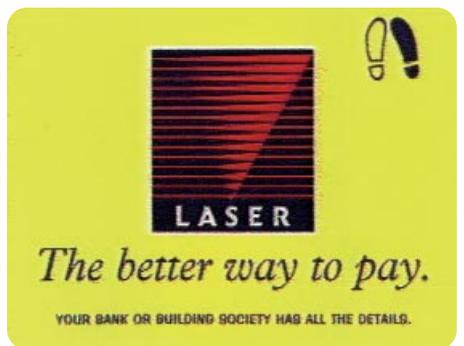
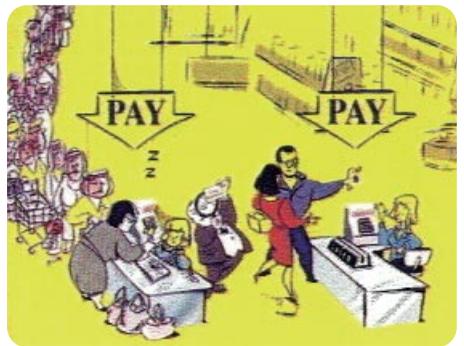
And, in addition to your purchases, you can withdraw up to £75 cash on demand at selected outlets.

While others are struggling with cheque books or queuing for cash, our Sale Survivor is in and out in a fraction of the time. So many shops. So little time. So, do it the easy way with Laser. Your bank or building society has all the details.

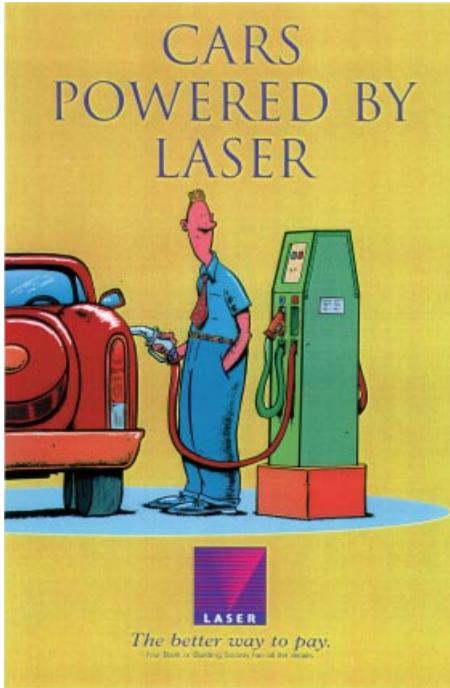


Waltz through your day with Laser - the better way to pay.

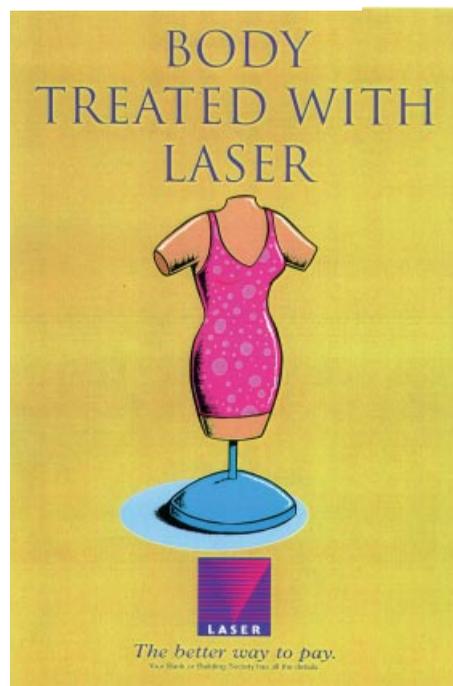
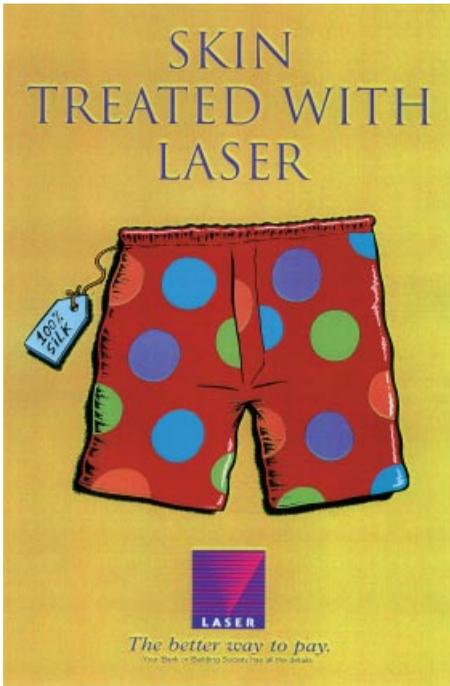
B/W press.



TV commercial .



6 sheet campaign.



EYES TREATED WITH LASER



Your sunglasses serve two, equally important, functions. Keeping the sun out of your eyes and dazzling everybody else. Laser is the most convenient way to give your eyes the treatment they deserve. It really shines when it comes to paying for life's little luxuries. Of course if you currently use Laser you know this already. Hindsight is, after all, 20/20 vision.



Your Bank or Building Society has all the details.

The better way to pay.

Colour press.

<p>START Your shopping list is 3 pages long. Throw 3 to start.</p>	<p>Can't find cheque book. Throw 2, score, burst into tears - or simply use Laser to pay instead. It's faster and easier, so have 2 more goes.</p>			<p>YOU FIND PARKING SPACE TREATED FOR SHOCK.</p>	<p>GO BACK 2 PLACES.</p>	
<p>NEW YEAR!</p>	<p>CHRISTMAS SHOPPING</p> <p>A GAME OF SURVIVAL WITH LASER - THE BETTER WAY TO PAY.</p> <p>If you want a safe, easy and convenient way to pay for goods and services this Christmas the name of the game is definitely Laser.</p> <p>Laser is the new debit card service from Ireland's leading financial institutions.</p> <p>Using Laser is much easier than writing a cheque and it cuts down on the need to carry cash. You simply swipe the card, sign the slip - and that's it! The amount is charged to your bank or building society account within a couple of days and your Laser transactions are detailed on your regular statement to help you keep in step with your finances. When you require cash, Laser makes it more accessible than ever - Laser card users can withdraw up to €75 cash on demand with their transaction at selected outlets. Shopping with Laser will put a glide in your stride this Christmas. You can zip round the shops with a minimum of fuss - secure in the knowledge that you are carrying less cash than ever before.</p> <p>So much to do, so little time. So, make sure you make the most of Laser.</p> <p>Your bank or building society has all the details.</p>					
<p>NOT: STATEMENT ARRIVES. NOT AS BROKE AS YOU EXPECTED. RESOLVE TO BE RICHER TO EVERYONE NEXT YEAR. STARTING WITH YOURSELF. ARE LASER CARDS SHOPPING IN THE SALES? DOWNSTON.</p>						<p>LASER SAVES YOU TIME PAYING FOR GOODS AND SERVICES IN DEPARTMENT STORES, SUPERMARKETS, PETROL STATIONS AND RESTAURANTS. BOOGIE ON DOWN TO COFFEE SHOP.</p>
<p>ROMANTIC DINNER FOR TWO. THINK OTHER HALF PAYS WITH LASER. THROW AGAIN TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE NOT DEFRAUDING.</p>		<p>CLOUD</p>		<p>CHRISTMAS BUSINESS LUNCH. BOSS FORGETS CHEQUE BOOK. YOU PAY WITH LASER. ADVANCE TO PROMOTION IN NEW YEAR.</p>	<p>RUN OUT OF CASH. NO PROBLEM AT SELECTED OUTLETS YOU CAN WITHDRAW UP TO €75 CASH ON DEMAND WITH LASER. SHOPPING COMPLETED. ADVANCE TO CLOUD 9.</p>	<p>COFFEE SHOP</p>

B/W press.