

Beiersdorf

CHRONICLE

08



Coppertone

An American brand icon

From Miami to Hamburg

The eventful history of an iconic brand

Acquiring an iconic brand such as Coppertone is a rare opportunity for a company. Globally, only a handful of brands like this exist – and the chances of one of them not only coming up for sale but also being compatible with the portfolio of another company are low. But when Beiersdorf publicly announced the purchase in 2019, it was clear that Coppertone, Beiersdorf, and NIVEA are a “perfect match”. The brand goes back a long way, and – similar to NIVEA in Europe – can almost be classed as part of the USA’s cultural heritage. Nonetheless, digging into the company’s history proved anything but straightforward. There are lots of stories and legends about how the company was founded, but the actual chronology is much harder to trace. We wanted to get to the bottom of it.

So first of all, we needed to find out whether Coppertone had archives. Supported by Bayer AG, the previous owner, we were put on the scent. Then, after several months of research, we were finally able to track

down an archive service provider in Atlanta. The following presentation is based on the material we found here. In contrast to earlier CHRONICLES, this version aims to introduce the Beiersdorf employees to a brand which is unfamiliar to many. Broadly speaking, through the 20th century, the brand developed along similar lines to NIVEA. And on home territory, it’s also comparable in terms of image and popularity. Allow us to whisk you away to the USA, where the journey begins in the middle of the 20th century – in an era where sun protection was not at the top of anybody’s list of priorities, and in a world which still bore the scars of war and destruction. But even in such times, there were people who, undeterred by circumstances, turned their ideas into successful products. One such man was Benjamin Green, a pharmacist, who created one of America’s first sunscreen products at home, at his kitchen stove.



“When I tell people I work on the Coppertone business, they immediately recollect the fragrance, the little girl and her dog, and their own childhood summery days.”

Jean Fufidio, Beiersdorf Inc., Parsippany NJ

“When in the US, you say you work for Nivea, no one knows it. When you say you work for Coppertone: ‘Oh yes, I have been using this since I was a child!’”

Karolin Konopka, Beiersdorf AG, Hamburg

“Coppertone from my perspective seems like it has always been around. It’s been referenced in TV shows, movies, and books. It is synonymous with skincare and summer.”

Jennifer Gilbert, Beiersdorf Manufacturing Cleveland, Cleveland TN



The inventor – a pharmacist, of course

According to the legend, the sunscreen developed by Benjamin Green (who was not only a pharmacist but also a former Air Force pilot) was first used in US military aircraft in 1944. The aim was to protect fighter pilots in the Pacific against sunburn. But back in Green's new home state, Florida, citizens of the "Sunshine State" also needed protection against the sun's rays. So Green got to work.

We don't know for sure exactly how or where Benjamin Green got the idea for making the first Coppertone product. Quite possibly, he was prompted by various trips to the beaches of Miami in the mid-1940s to work on an idea which had been in the back of his mind for some time

Text: Thorsten Finke / Daniel Wallburg

>> Benjamin Green and his wife moved to Miami, Florida, in 1943. The US Air Force heard that he was an experienced pharmacist and commissioned him to develop a sunscreen for fighter pilots. Green quickly came up with a solution: he used red Vaseline, a product that was originally developed for veterinary purposes, to develop a sunscreen in 1944 that actually succeeded in preventing the dreaded sunburn. News of its success quickly spread, and before long, people in Miami wanted to buy it too.

Working from home, Green continued to experiment with the formula of his product. He added cocoa butter and conducted numerous tests to improve the formula. Then, after stirring his new mixture in a pot on his own stove at home, he tested it personally by smearing it onto his balding head and venturing out under Florida's hot sun. He named his new product "Coppertone" to reference the desired copper tan. With a coastline more than 1,300 kilometers long, protection against sunburn was an ever-present issue in the "Sunshine State". Previously, no adequate solution had been found to the problem. So circumstances were promising for Green's new product. After the war, he sold a first batch of bottles to a local retailer. Coppertone was thus one of the USA's first sunscreens.

Who was Benjamin Green?

Benjamin Green was born in Hungary in 1895. He and his family emigrated to the USA in 1904 and settled in Cleveland, Ohio. Benjamin, who was eight years old at the time, attended local schools and went on to study pharmacy at Ohio State University. He graduated top of his year and subsequently worked in various



pharmacies. Then, in 1943, he and his wife Kathryn moved from Cleveland to Miami, where he opened his own pharmacy. Although he went on to sell the rights to Coppertone in 1950, developing the product in 1944 was the highlight of his career. Green died in Miami in 1978. In a newspaper interview, his wife once said, "In many ways, he was a genius. But unfortunately, he was not a financial genius. He sold his company without demanding royalties for Coppertone (...)." Coppertone didn't make Benjamin Green rich, but in the USA, he earned his niche in people's memories as the "inventor of sunscreen".

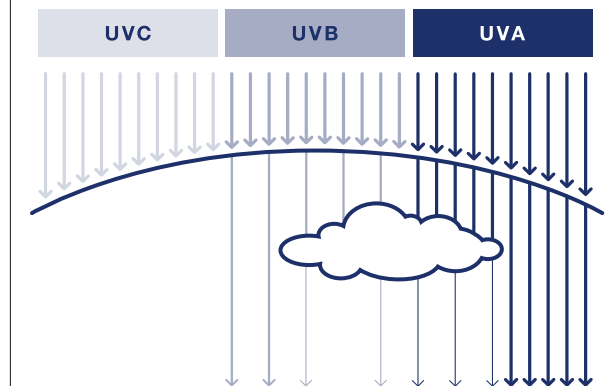
"When he got home at night, he would cook up something on the stove using a granite coffee pot he had bought at a used restaurant supply house."
Cocoa butter, the main ingredient, was hard to come by because of the war. "He would go to different drug stores and buy one-half a pound at a time. We didn't have a source of supply. We were nobodies," Mrs. Green said.
She said he tested each batch on his own bald head.

Excerpt from an article about Benjamin Green, published shortly after his death in 1978

BACKGROUND

What does sunscreen actually protect us from?

Back in 1801, the German physicist and philosopher Johann Wilhelm Ritter conducted an experiment and discovered ultraviolet radiation at the energy-rich end of the spectrum of visible light. "Ultraviolet" means "beyond violet", violet being the color with the shortest visible wavelength. The sun is a natural source of UV radiation. As sunlight passes into the Earth's atmosphere, most of the radiation is absorbed by the ozone layer. Unlike UVB and UVC rays, UVA rays have a longer wavelength and reach the Earth's surface unfiltered. The level of radiation varies according to latitude, time of year, and time of day, cloud coverage, and altitude. Prolonged, unprotected exposure to UVA and UVB radiation can damage skin. Short-wave UVB rays cause sunburn and can trigger skin cancer, while long-wave UVA rays accelerate skin aging processes and can cause sun allergies.



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Two Coppertone products dating from the early 1950s. The slogan "Don't be a paleface", picturing a Native American, was used from 1945 to 1955.

Coppertone: one of America's first ever sunscreen products

Douglas Laboratories Corp. produced and marketed Green's invention, using the newly created name "Coppertone". The first bottles appeared on store shelves in March 1945. In 1950, Green sold the brand to three investors, Charles E. Clowe, George U. Robson, and Ernest R. Nitzsche from Miami, who initially commissioned Douglas Laboratories in Miami to continue with production. In 1953, they applied for a patent for the brand name "Coppertone", and the US patent office registered the brand on January 25, 1955. By this time, a new logo had been developed for Coppertone. The previous image of a Native American and the "Don't be a paleface" slogan was replaced with an image of "Little Miss Coppertone", accompanied by a small dog pulling at her bikini bottom. According to an article in the Miami Herald, this logo was designed in 1953 by Tally Embry Advertising, but did not gain fame until 1959 when Joyce Ballantyne Brand revised the original sketches on behalf of Grant Advertising. The little girl in the picture was based on Cheri, the artist's daughter.



1944

1955



1959



Coppertone production site in the 1960s with legendary logo on the roof

Top left: Employees standing in front of Douglas Laboratories in Miami Beach, Florida · Top right: A common sight on streets throughout the country from 1956 onwards: huge Coppertone billboards

New owners, new products

When the company changed hands in the 1950s and again in the 1970s, Coppertone grew from a local to an international brand. The new owners conducted major advertising campaigns and launched numerous new product ideas to make Coppertone synonymous with sun protection in the USA.



New products were developed as early as 1955, and a new sun spray named “Spray it on – Coppertone Suntan Oil” was launched on the market. The same year, more new products were launched to protect sensitive skin. In 1957, Plough Inc. from Memphis, Tennessee took over the brand and turned Coppertone into a household name across the whole of the USA. Television and movie stars were recruited as faces for the brand, and Coppertone rose to become one of the biggest sun protection brands in the USA. Lipkote, a sun protection product for the lips, was launched in 1958, followed just two years later by Coppertone QT, the first self-tanning line. In 1971, Plough Inc. merged with the Schering Corporation and changed its name to Schering-Plough. The Schering Corporation was founded in 1941, following expropriation of the German Schering Group’s US branch by the US government. Schering property was administered by the government until privatization in 1952, at which point the German Schering Group lost all rights to its own name in North America. Backed by Schering-Plough, Coppertone advanced to become the leading sunscreen brand in the

USA, to the point of becoming synonymous with sun protection – rather like NIVEA in Europe. To this day, the brand is omnipresent at beaches up and down the east and west coasts of America, and its fragrance embodies the smell of summer for many Americans. From November 2009, after nearly forty years under the management of Schering-Plough, Coppertone changed hands several times in quick succession. First, Schering-Plough was taken over by Merck & Co. Then, in 2015, Merck & Co. sold all consumer business – including the Coppertone brand – to Bayer AG. This, however, proved to be equally short-lived, and in 2019, Coppertone finally came to rest with the Beiersdorf AG.

“Skin care is at the heart of Beiersdorf – and caring for skin health through sun protection has been an essential pillar of our business for over 60 years,” reported Stefan De Loecker, CEO of Beiersdorf, commenting on the takeover. “We are pleased to offer the iconic Coppertone brand and its dedicated, experienced employees a new home. The sun care pioneers of Europe and the US will join forces to provide trusted sun protection to consumers around the world.”



The complete Coppertone product range at the beginning of the 1960s

Successful products from the 1980s: increasing importance is attached to the sun protection factor



Selected products from the 2020 Coppertone range

An American icon is born

Brand icons are relatable and offer orientation by connecting with people's lifestyles and/or values. This injects a brand with charisma. It also takes clever marketing, a sixth sense for the zeitgeist, and a little luck – as with Coppertone.

Coppertone and the surfing world

Early Coppertone advertising focused strongly on connections with the surfing world. Surfing is far more than just a water activity. Many surfers define themselves by the sport; it shapes their lifestyles and mentality. In some locations, it's also become the chief identifying feature for the region. Surfing boomed in the USA in the 1920s, when first surfing competitions were organized and the middle classes could finally afford cars. By the 1960s, when the Beach Boys Surfin' U.S.A. hit became the new anthem for surfers along the west coast of America, California was regarded as the embodiment of the sport and the corresponding lifestyle. In January 1960, a special surfing magazine was launched – the first to be dedicated solely to this sport.

Coppertone made the surfing culture an integral part of its own advertising strategy and used well-known female radio and movie stars for their campaigns. One such face of the brand was Annette Funicello, a singer and actress born in 1942 who, at the tender age of 12, was chosen by Walt Disney himself for his "Mickey Mouse Club" television show. In the 1960s, Annette Funicello acted in various US beach movies such as Beach Party and Bikini Beach. One Coppertone advertising campaign shows her sitting on a surfboard that has been lifted into the air.



Annette Funicello became so well-known in the course of her career that the mere mention of her first name sufficed, and people knew instantly who was meant.

BACKGROUND

NIVEA and Coppertone – parallel developments

Although they emerged on different continents, NIVEA and Coppertone developed along very similar lines. After the Second World War, sun protection products began their sweep of triumph, and tanned skin became the new beauty ideal and dominated advertising both in Europe and America. The American surf and beach culture of the 1960s was matched on European soil by wanderlust, the Mediterranean, and wicker beach chairs on Baltic beaches. On one side of the Atlantic, it was the Beach Boys who gave musical expression to the new craving for beaches and the sea; back in Europe, similar sentiments were expressed in songs such as Capri-Fischer. This was the world in which both brands thrived and developed their advertising slogans, accompanied by the emergence of SPF's in the 1970s. Both brands also used similar imagery. In the 1980s and 90s, both brands introduced sun blockers and products for sensitive skin in order to cater to consumer wishes. The focus of advertising shifted away from flawless tans to the protection factor. SPF's of up to 50+ with NIVEA and 100 with Coppertone reflect the way in which consumer wishes and expectations have changed from the middle of the twentieth century to the present day.



From California to the rest of the world – surf music

Surfing and music have much in common: both are fueled by widespread passion, both pulsate with energy, and both are fun. In the world of music, one band that captured the essence of surfing like no other: the Beach Boys. The band, consisting of the three Wilson brothers, "invented" surf music in California in the 1960s. American teenagers were instantly attracted to this casual version of rock 'n' roll. And they weren't the only ones; all around the

world, loudspeakers blared out the promise of endless summer. Coppertone exploited the connection between music, sport, and beaches in its entire marketing strategy – not just in isolated advertising campaigns. In the 1970s, Coppertone sponsored at least one concert with the Beach Boys, and in 1981, they published a "Best of" album with hits such as "Surfer Girl" and "California Girls".





A 1970s giveaway: Coppertone entered the sunglasses sector in the 1980s with "Coppertone OPTI-RAY"

The zeitgeist changes

The literal translation of the word "zeitgeist" is "spirit of the age", and it refers to the attempt to give expression to the special peculiarities, attitudes, and lifestyles of an era. Coppertone recognized the social changes resulting from the surfing culture in America in the 1960s, including the accompanying music and film styles, and exploited them cleverly. Their slogan "Coppertone gives you a better tan" awakened all the feelings connected with the above influences and made people feel that they were a part of this casual, liberty-loving movement – despite the fact that their lifestyles in reality were actually very different. Well-known movie and television actresses conveyed the new image, which even seeped into and impacted children's toys: Barbie® dolls are the veritable embodiment of the spirit of the age and the corresponding clichés. Although toy manufacturer Mattel has never confirmed the report officially, rumor has it that the design of the 1971 Malibu Barbie® was based on Coppertone model Sharon Tate and her role as Malibu in the 1967 comedy "Don't Make Waves".

Looking back at the way the Coppertone brand developed, it seems the blueprint was perfect. However, it's not quite clear what ultimately transformed the brand into an icon. We can only say for sure that each of the influences mentioned above played a part.



Tanned skin is presented as the beauty ideal in a Coppertone advertising campaign in the 1980s

„The smell of Coppertone will forever be associated with summer fun and going to the beach with family and friends.“

Carol Lombard, Beiersdorf Manufacturing Cleveland, Cleveland TN

BLUEPRINT

Coppertone advertising from the 1960s

Through their advertising campaigns in the 1960s, Coppertone focused on a wide range of better and lesser known actresses. The images shown here are a selection of advertisements and movie posters showing the models who posed for the Coppertone brand.



Nancy Kovack, an American movie and theater actress, acted predominantly in well-known television series. She also worked as a model. She appears in "I Dream of Jeannie" and "Star Trek". Her best-known role was in the 1963 movie "Jason and the Argonauts".

And even a German actress numbers amongst the ranks in the Coppertone ads: Elke Sommer. In the 1960s, Elke Sommer succeeded in making a name for herself in Hollywood – previously uncharted territory for a German actress. Over the course of her career, she acted in no fewer than 100 movies and television shows.

The film studios of Hollywood produce commercially successful movies such as "Where the Boys Are" (1960) and "Beach Party" (1963) in which sand, sun, and surfing create the backdrop for the movie's romantic plot. The same is true of the comedy "Don't Make Waves", a movie dating from 1967. Coppertone quickly signed a contract with Sharon Tate, who played Malibu and was widely regarded as the world's most beautiful woman at the time.

Tans as symbols of beauty?

Up until the start of the twentieth century, tanned skin was not considered a symbol of beauty in the western world. In the following decades, however, social developments, new fashion trends, and scientific findings changed people's associations with tanned skin.



The beach culture changes

In the 1920s and 1930s, low-back swimsuits came into vogue and became increasingly popular amongst the general public. But as bathing suits revealed more and more skin, the necessity for sun protection also increased. People also had more and more leisure time at their disposal, so spent longer out of doors. Hence they needed sun protection.



A fashion "explosion"

The first bikini – named after Bikini Atoll, a nuclear testing site – appeared in 1946. It heralded the dawn of a new fashion. More and more people were traveling to beaches and sunbathing extensively to get tanned. Sun protection products were relatively expensive and used sparingly. But as the middle class prospered, so the market expanded. Tanned skin, flaunted by actresses such as Ursula Andress, remained in vogue through the 1960s. In the James Bond movie "Dr. No", Andress, sporting a white bikini and a perfect tan, emerges gracefully from the ocean waves. The beauty ideal gained ground, and toy manufacturer Mattel responded to the enduring trend by creating a tanned Malibu Barbie® to join its pale sisters in 1971.



Scientific insights

Mid-1980s: scientists discover the hole in the ozone layer. Fear of skin cancer grows; global awareness campaigns are launched. But despite all efforts, most people still love sunbathing. Sunlight gives people a feeling of freedom, puts them in a good mood, and supports important bodily functions. Nonetheless, modern fashion styles reveal less skin. We also put on sun cream with a high SPF before we leave the house, and we use apps to monitor sunbathing.

IMPRINT

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