

# CRAZY UNCLE HARD SODA

*An Orbit Strategies Case Study*



## Executive Summary

Orbit partnered with Crazy Uncle, a Canadian craft cocktail brand known for nostalgic, indulgent flavours, to revitalize its brand presence through social media, packaging design consultation, and a complete website redesign. The multi-faceted project aimed to reposition Crazy Uncle for a broader demographic, increase market accessibility, and introduce a new product line without compromising the brand's core identity. This case study explores the strategic thinking, creative decisions, execution, and early impact across each of the three verticals, while referencing industry best practices and branding case studies for contextual validation.

## Background & Challenge

Crazy Uncle is a ready-to-drink (RTD) cocktail brand originating in Canada, known for its bold, nostalgic flavours such as Root Beer, Cream Soda, and Orange Cream. It appeals to consumers looking for elevated cocktail experiences with the convenience of a pre-mixed can. However, despite strong performance in traditional alcohol retail environments (e.g., LCBO), Crazy Uncle faced critical challenges that limited its growth and long-term viability. The RTD category is among the fastest-growing in the beverage sector, with consumers increasingly demanding innovation, health-conscious alternatives, and immersive brand experiences. Crazy Uncle needed to expand its appeal beyond its loyal but niche customer base, launch a new lighter, more “crushable” product aimed at frequent consumption without overwhelming the palate, improve online engagement and conversion in light of shifting consumer buying habits, and address discoverability issues as distribution extended beyond liquor stores to convenience and grocery channels (C&G).

Orbit was brought in to solve three primary issues: social media engagement to create a cohesive, emotionally resonant brand presence across platforms, packaging design consultation to guide visual identity based on consumer psychology and behaviour, and a website redesign to overhaul UX, functionality, and storytelling to drive consumer engagement, answer common product questions, and support retail discovery.

## Strategic Approach

Orbit recognized the latent emotional capital in the brand name “Crazy Uncle.” Rather than targeting one demographic with trend-chasing content, the creative strategy leaned into nostalgic cues shared across generations. This included visual motifs inspired by family memories, vintage colour grading, and soft beiges that match Crazy Uncle's existing palette. Content themes referenced old-school sitcoms, family road trips, backyard BBQs, and time-honoured traditions, while UGC-style campaigns encouraged followers to share their own “Crazy Uncle” stories. This approach is supported by emotional branding research, which shows that shared memories and multi-generational nostalgia improve brand recall and affinity.

Key tactics included regularly posted content themed around holidays, milestones, and Canadian cultural touchpoints; a visual tone that is consistent, warm, and inviting, balancing humour and sentiment; and “Uncle Wisdom” posts with life advice or playful tips that reinforce the brand's playful, familial identity. Early metrics showed increased engagement rates, more shares per post, and an uptick in profile visits,

signalling improved resonance with both new and returning users.

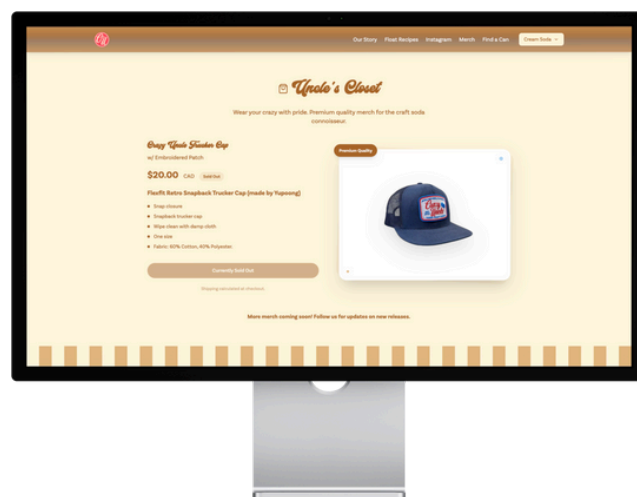
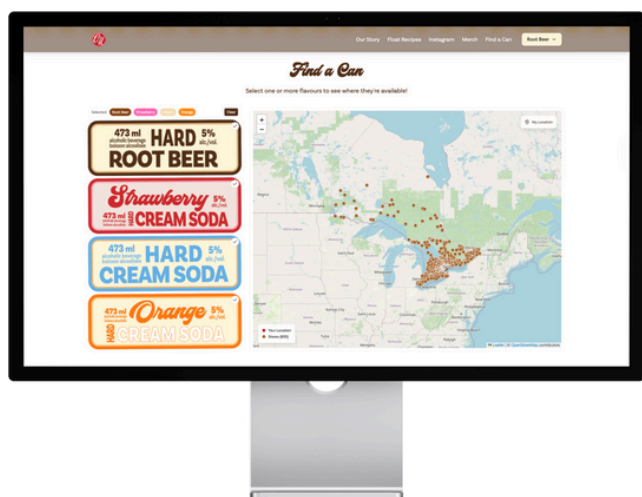
Crazy Uncle's legacy product line features bold, dessert-like flavours with heavy vanilla or cream profiles. While successful, internal data revealed consumers often struggled to consume more than one or two drinks in a sitting due to flavour intensity and perceived density. The company's pivot to a lighter, lemon-lime-mint profile needed to overcome existing brand associations with indulgence and signal a new kind of drinking experience: refreshing and natural-feeling.

In our consultation role, Orbit advised Crazy Uncle on how consumer behaviour and psychological perception align with visual packaging elements. Specifically, we recommended leveraging a clear background to expose the silver aluminum of the can, a design choice that suggests transparency and minimalism, both key visual cues associated with natural and light products. Research supports that packaging clarity and visible materiality (like aluminum) can convey purity, honesty, and a refreshing quality to consumers, even before the product is tasted. This shift in visual language was aimed at reinforcing the "crushable" quality of the new drink while differentiating it from the heavier, legacy line.

According to design research from PepsiCo's in-house branding team, packaging isn't just a container; it's a canvas for emotional and sensory cues that shape expectations. Although the product has not officially launched, preliminary consumer response in controlled settings favoured the new visual approach, with testers describing the can as "clean," "cooling," and "easy to spot." The exposed aluminum was particularly noted as "honest" and "refreshing."

### Website Redesign: Functionality Meets Brand Storytelling

Crazy Uncle's previous website lacked modern UX functionality. Customers frequently asked where they could buy products, what ingredients were in each drink, whether the drinks were carbonated or caffeinated, and whether they could purchase merchandise. Orbit's redesign addressed these issues with a geolocation-enabled store locator, with plans for real-time stock information per location. They built detailed product pages with allergen, ingredient, and carbonation/caffeine callouts, and included visual icons and clear language for mobile users. A merch store was introduced, beginning with the Crazy Uncle Hat, and the site was designed to support future additions like drink recipes, blog content, and community spotlights. Check it out at [www.crazyuncle.ca](http://www.crazyuncle.ca)



The visual design maintained nostalgic, warm tones while modernizing layout. Built mobile-first, the site prioritized speed and clear navigation, ensuring no more than three clicks from homepage to conversion. The website's structure and design were based on principles from top-performing food & beverage sites, which emphasize visual storytelling, easy navigation, and clear product info.

### Hypothesized Value & Strategic Impact

Although full data is pending the new product launch, key anticipated benefits include stronger brand equity through a sense of identity, belonging, and emotional value; portfolio segmentation that allows Crazy Uncle to introduce sub-lines without confusing customers; retail support via the store locator that aids in sell-through and supports grocery/convenience partnerships; increased customer trust through transparent can design and complete product information; and lifestyle growth through the merch shop, opening paths to brand extensions beyond beverages.



### Risk Mitigation & Lessons Learned

Potential risks included alienating existing customers, as legacy fans may be confused by the new look. This was mitigated by positioning the new product as a line extension, not a replacement. Portfolio complexity, with more SKUs and retail formats, could overwhelm customers. This was addressed using website filters and social content to guide navigation. Distribution disparities in C&G retailers were anticipated, so locator tools and stock transparency were implemented to manage expectations.

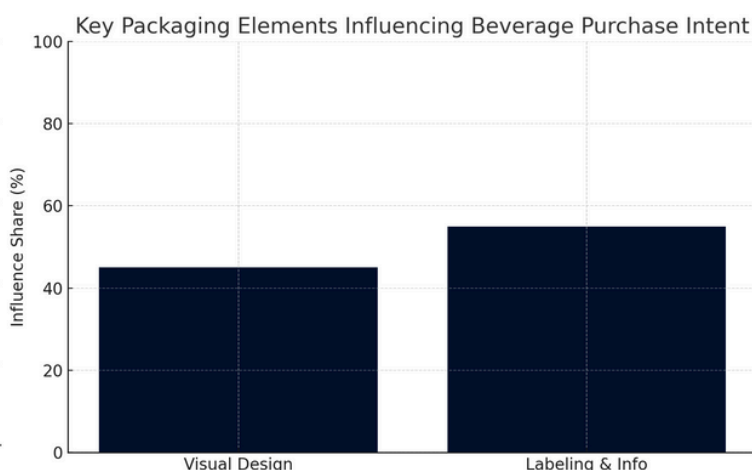
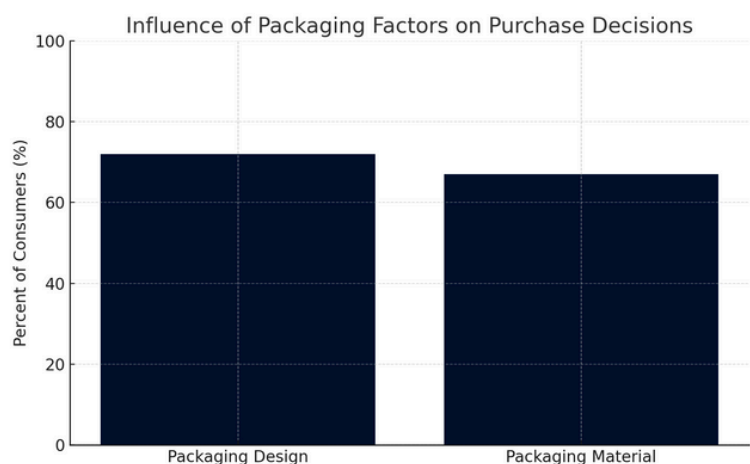
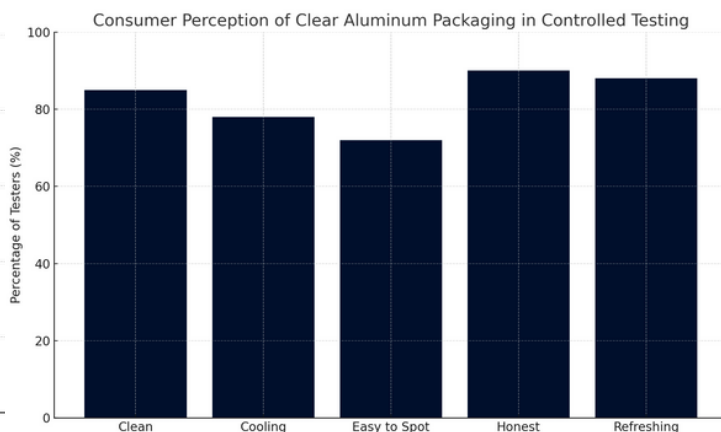
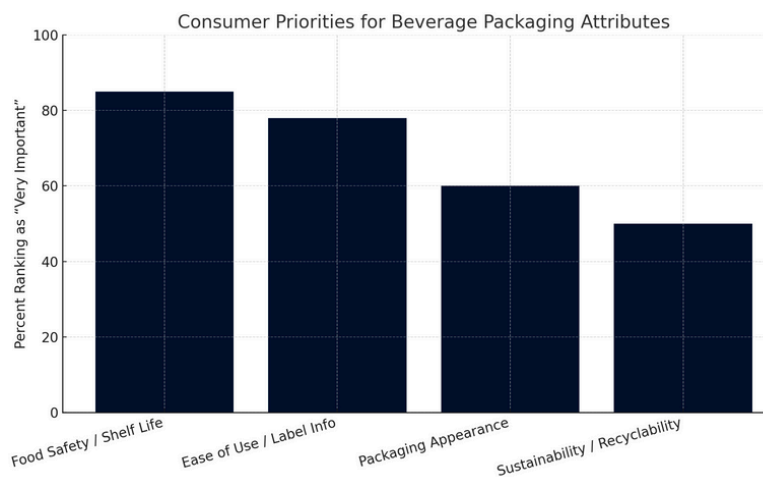
Key insights gained include the realization that nostalgia is powerful but must be layered with modern relevance, that packaging which signals consumption style (e.g., “crushable”) helps set expectations and enhances satisfaction, and that transparency, literal and metaphorical, is increasingly demanded by consumers.

### Recommendations & Future Enhancements

Orbit recommends monitoring and optimizing key site metrics such as locator usage, time on product pages, conversion rates, and merch sales. Social themes should be expanded to include platforms like TikTok with short-form content like “Uncle Chronicles.” A product finder quiz could be launched to help customers discover their ideal drink based on mood, time, and taste. Seasonal or nostalgic-themed drinks tied to Canadian holidays or pop culture could be introduced as limited drops. Finally, partnerships with family-oriented or nostalgia-focused influencers could help amplify campaign reach.

## Conclusion: Modernizing a Classic, Authentically

The Crazy Uncle project exemplifies how brands with strong DNA can evolve meaningfully without sacrificing their identity. Orbit's strategic approach, spanning storytelling, sensory design, and seamless UX, allowed Crazy Uncle to modernize while remaining true to its roots. In today's crowded beverage landscape, where branding begins long before the first sip, this case demonstrates the competitive advantage of integrated, emotion-first design thinking. As Crazy Uncle prepares to launch its new line, the brand is better positioned than ever to convert nostalgia into loyalty and taste into lifestyle.



## Sources

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