



The last word on brands in M&S

Making a break with 85 years of retailing tradition, last month Marks and Spencer has confirmed reports that it will begin stocking its shelves with a selection of well known, branded products beside its own. Whereas previously all of the household and grocery products were sold under the retailer's own-label St Michael – which has been seen on M&S goods since 1928 – customers will now also be able to find familiar favourites in store.

Commenting on this defining moment in Marks and Spencer's long established trading history, its chief executive Sir Stuart Rose suggested that customer convenience was at the heart of the decision. "Our customers...lead increasingly busy lives so buying those...must-have branded products at M&S will help save them time" Sir Stuart declared, before not-so-subtly hinting "when I want to buy Tabasco, I have to go to Sainsbury's".

Although undoubtedly better for the shopper, one does question whether this initiative will impose new and unnecessary challenges for those marketing the high street giant's own-brand products. Why buy St Michael cornflakes when Kellogg's – a specialist alternative – is available alongside? For M&S is, in reality, a brand in its own right and its own-label goods, some of which may be sidelined by the influx of these "must-have" products, are branded merchandise like any other.

Although M&S promises that none of its products will be de-listed and that instead, focus will be concentrated on filling gaps where there is no own-brand equivalent, the emphasis being given to offering the customer more choice may not necessarily work entirely in the company's overall long-term favour, not least because an important differentiator is being eroded.

And what is the outlook for the brands themselves? It is inevitable that some of their sales will simply migrate from another grocery outlet to M & S, rather than increase as a result of this development. So for them the question is the old one of balancing margins, relationships and trade promotions across a number of retail outlets. It remains to be seen how

M & S fits into this mix from their perspective.

Tracey Bagshaw
Managing
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The last word On brand experience potential in M&S

New locations are always of interest for experiential agencies, yet it remains to be seen whether M&S will open its doors to brands and their agencies to deliver 'experiences' in or just outside its stores. Given the revenue stream it creates, it would make sense in these hard times to do so, which means that agencies will be already clambering over each other to get the opportunity to run this element. It would make sense for M&S, already exponents of sampling in-store, to open this out to brands as manufacturer spend on shopper marketing continues to climb exponentially.

Bruce Gardner, Kreate

Although we don't yet know much detail, this sounds like a fantastic opportunity for marketers and for experiential marketing. Branded products will be able to capitalise not only on Marks & Spencer's unique positioning, but also its unique place in the nation's hearts. This gives marketers the chance to talk directly to Marks & Spencer customers for the first time and to show those customers how their products can fit into their lives. But, like all experiential marketing, it will be important to find the right brand ambassadors, people who are not only right for the brand but for this rather different retail environment.

Liz Richardson, Closer

The last word On the Broom leaving toon

Newcastle makes me think of Newcastle Brown Ale, but it also makes me think of St James's Park, the Tyne, Geordie accents – and more recently Cheryl Cole.

A positive way of promoting the ale following the furore over the switch to manufacturing in Yorkshire would be to share the Geordie love of the product. A campaign talking about the roots and history of Newcastle Brown should emphasise that it doesn't matter where it is brewed because it has long been, and will always be, an intrinsic part of Newcastle culture.

Examples of how it might do this include undertaking a roadshow touring the UK or key locations in a branded tour bus, giving away samples and merchandise and conducting competitions. Staff would have to be true Geordies with authentic accents – perhaps even former brewery staff who would act as fabulous ambassadors for this kind of activity. Cheryl Cole look-alikes would go down well too.

Another way to engender loyalty around the brand could be to create an exclusive 'Blue Star Club' – the blue star is part of the label and has history regarding the founding breweries. Club membership might include a loyalty card that rewards purchase, as well as added extras such as VIP entry into football matches, nightclubs, or other events and entertainment that the Newcastle Brown brand sponsors or partners with.

Behzad Saednejad, Blackjack Promotions

The harsh reality is that sales of Newcie Brown are twice that in the US, as they are in the UK, and when it comes to business, there is little place for sentiment during these times.

Bruce Gardner, Kreate

The first word On P&G's store-led marketing

P&G's global brand building officer, Marc Pritchard, recently underlined his 'store back' strategy, saying that all marketing must work at store level or it isn't working.

You can do as much planning for a campaign as you want, but it's only by being in the store that you can really understand if and why the campaign is working.

Victoria White, Tullo Marshall Warren

Field marketing and experiential activity can provide the marketer with unique shopper insights – but too few marketers are currently using those insights in a meaningful way. There needs to be a greater understanding of the value of the data that field marketers collect, and a greater propensity to not only collect data but to use it on a continuing basis. If this information is employed correctly, it can play a vital role in planning and developing marketing activity across the board.

Liz Richardson, Closer

Building a two way dialogue instore, be it with shoppers or the retailers themselves, is one of the most invaluable benefits that Field Marketing can bring to brands. Hard EPOS data and sales figures will only take you so far; field marketing bridges a knowledge gap by providing the opinion and thought rationale at the "moment of truth".

Laura Leonard, Momentum, account director for P&G

The last word On Autumn's postal strikes

The postal strike made everybody – particularly marketers who depend on the post to get their messages across – re-evaluate the medium. Inevitably, there will be fallout as marketers find alternative delivery systems and even alternative channels to talk to consumers – and FMBE could benefit hugely. Brand experience is the purest form of direct marketing because of its ability to reach people with an appropriate message when they are in a receptive mindset

Liz Richardson, Closer

The recent postal strikes will not directly affect experiential marketing, yet it is clearly another nail in the coffin for the ailing DM industry. The days of mass mail outs are still around, but increasingly under threat from more cost effective, targeted digital campaigns. DM needs to ensure its relevance and inclusion in integrated campaigns, for example with experiential marketing, so that an element of DM becomes a key process in completing the consumer journey, either raising awareness of and driving traffic to an experience, or delivering something tangible as a reward post the experience. It's a case of swallowing pride and changing with the times as we all have to do constantly.

Bruce Gardner, Kreate