

The Grocer

Focus On: Cheese by Nick Hughes (nickjhughes@hotmail.co.uk)

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The Story

Overall, the cheese market has returned to growth and some brands have seen sales rise, although cheddar is continuing to lose share to own label. Why? What can the market's strugglers learn from the brands in growth? What's in store for the coming year? And how are prices being impacted by the ongoing economic uncertainty?

Key Themes

Life beyond Cheddar: Are consumers exploring other cheeses? What are producers and retailers doing to encourage shoppers to buy outside of Cheddar? What about sales and innovation in Continental cheese? The feature will also look at activity within exotic cheeses (eg Halloumi, Feta and Paneer) and also sheep and goats cheese.

Retailers: This feature will pay close attention to how different retailers are approaching the category and how their strategies are affecting their sales performance. Which retailers have been most aggressive in rationalising their ranges? How have their own label ranges evolved? What are the key differences in terms of promotions, pricing, merchandising and so on?

Sub sectors: We'll be analysing different formats (eg, grated, sliced) and on-the-go products (mini portions are in strong growth). Within this feature we will explore which macro trends and other factors have affected the fortunes of cheese over the past year. How are players looking to sustain growth or turn things around? Which brands have driven mini portions' growth?

Price/promotions: This is a key theme of the feature. How have retail prices and input costs changed over the past year? How much cheese is sold on promotion? Which retailers and brands are pushing the hardest on promotions? What tactics are they using? How has this changed from 12 months ago?

Own label vs brands: Own label is in growth while brands continue to suffer. Why is this? What are branded players doing to improve their fortunes? How are retailers looking to add value back into the category with own label?

Advertising and marketing: This feature will also investigate how the marketing and advertising strategies of the category's biggest players have evolved over the past year and how they will develop in the coming year to sustain growth or return brands to growth. The top campaigns will be noted in a separate box along with data.

Innovation: Key to this feature will be a discussion of the latest NPD from the category's brands and own label players, large and small. The feature will explore the market trends that have inspired these innovations and weigh up which new launches are most likely to encourage new trends in the market. We will profile the most interesting new launches in a separate innovation panel including launch date and RSP, and a hi-res picture of each.

Key questions the feature is likely to address:

- What consumer trends have impacted the category over the past year?
- How have promotional strategies (both in terms of price and marketing) evolved?
- How have individual retailers' strategies impacted the market?
- How has merchandising changed in the market?
- What impact has own-label had on branded players?
- What's next for the category?