

The Grocer

Focus On: Bottled water by Andrew Lusher (me@andrewlusher.com)

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The Story

Brits have knocked back an extra 132 million litres of bottled water in the past year, growth of 11.4%, making this the strongest performing soft drinks sector yet again. What's driving the growth? Which brands and retailers are cashing in the most? How? Is anyone being left behind? Why? And what does the coming year have in store?

Key themes:

Health: With the soft drinks industry facing growing criticism from the health lobby, this feature will explore to what extent the growing health consciousness of shoppers is driving growth in bottled water. How have brands sought to drive home the health message?

Retailers: Central to this feature will be a discussion of how different retailers are approaching the category, in terms of branded and own label product ranges, merchandising, promotions, etc. With the sugar content of juice drinks, carbs, etc under growing scrutiny, is more space being given to flavoured and unflavoured water instead of conventional soft drinks?

Flavours: What does the year ahead hold for the flavoured bottled water sub sector? Is the sub sector subject to the same sort of scrutiny on sugar as the rest of the market? How much sugar do flavoured water brands contain? Are brands reformulating?

Innovation: This will be key to this feature. We will be investigating how new product development has shaped the category over the past year and what is in store for shoppers in 2017. We will be profiling four of the most interesting launches in a separate innovation panel.

Promotions and price: This feature will explore how the promotional strategies of retailers and brands have changed over the past year. Attention will be paid to the promotional strategies of retailers and how this has affected average prices over the past year.

Advertising and marketing: This feature will also investigate how the marketing and advertising strategies of the category's biggest brands have evolved over the past year and how they will develop in the coming year to sustain growth or return brands to growth.

Formats: This feature will include a separate box out on format innovations, including different sized bottles, sports caps and so on. How important is format to consumers when they're deciding which brand to buy? After all, water's just water, isn't it?

What's in a bottle?: Can anyone really tell on taste alone? Or is format really the key factor when it comes to purchase decisions? Please speak to brands about how they are developing bottles and other formats, and sports caps etc.

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?