

# The Grocer

**Focus On: Cooking sauces by Carina Perkins (carina.perkins@wrbm.com)**

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## The Story

**As Brits get more confident in the kitchen, they are more likely to trust themselves to rustle up a mean sauce. So sales of ready-made cooking sauces have continued their decline for the seventh year in a row; down 2.7% on the previous year, as brands take a particular hit. Plus, prices are down almost across the board as shoppers see sauces as a basic addition to their trolley, rather than a source of excitement. But there is a chink of light at the bottom of the jar. As shoppers become more adventurous in their tastes, they are willing to pay for exotic sauces that are harder to replicate than the trusty spag bol.**

## Key themes:

**You say pasta, I say passata:** Italian cooking sauces have taken a particular hit, down 3% on the year before. This is largely due to shoppers defecting to cheaper own label alternatives. Could the reluctance to pay more be down to the increase in shoppers using chopped tomatoes and passata for their Italian meals? Are Italian sauces simply too easy to replicate yourself, resulting in the commoditisation of the sub-category? As Kantar says, there is generally a “lack of excitement and engagement” with cooking sauces. So can suppliers launch more innovative products to tempt shoppers back?

**Exotic sauces:** All cuisines have suffered a decline apart from ‘other ethnic’ (as defined by Kantar), which may be injecting some much-needed excitement into the category. It is admittedly a small sub-category, but it is providing a potential ray of hope. What new cuisines are tempting shoppers? And why are these growing – is it that shoppers don’t yet have the confidence to whip up their own versions of these more exotic products?

**Traditional:** On the other end of the scale, own label traditional sauces are doing particularly well. And it is the only sub-category not to suffer a decline in average price. What is driving this?

**Health:** One of the key reasons for the consistent decline in cooking sauces is the perceived health benefit of scratch cooking. One brand arguably scored an own goal last year by warning some of its sauces were not suitable for everyday consumption and has since launched a no added sugar range to tempt back the health-conscious shopper so can brands win back consumers with health messaging?

**Less is more:** Suppliers are trying to cash in their majority demographic – one- and two-person households – with the launch of smaller products. These seem to be attracting a higher price per 100g, which could be good news.

**Innovations:** We identify four new products or product ranges that have ideally not appeared in The Grocer before including image, launch date and RSP.

## 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?