

CMO Roundtable *For Marketing Leaders in FMCG*



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Introduction

tml Partners recently hosted an exclusive roundtable event for FMCG Marketing Leaders. Attendees were invited to discuss key challenges and opportunities within the industry and the wider business landscape.

Key themes included:

- Finding the balance between short-term sales and long-term branding practices
- Bolstering or pivoting existing strategies to battle a tough business climate
- Innovation in the industry
- Filling skill gaps and sourcing specialist talent
- How Diversity & Inclusion can improve your understanding of the consumer

The conversation was led by Emma Calder, Manager at **tml Partners**. We were delighted to be joined by the following attendees:

- Adrian Mooney - VP Marketing, **Ex-Scholl**
- Corinne Chant - Marketing Director, **PepsiCo**
- Eleanor Barker - Global Brand Director - Plant Based, **Nomad Foods**
- Joanna Botwood - Head of Brand, **Method - People Against Dirty**
- Steve Monk - Director, **Integration Consulting** & Co-Founder of **Good Guys Bakehouse**
- Vikaas Saxena - Director of Strategy and New Business, **Phillip Morris**
- Jacqueline Ellis-Jones - Marketing Director, **Pip and Nut**
- Savan Sabharwal - Marketing Director, **Andros**
- Charlie Green - Managing Director, **tml Partners**
- Charlotte Brownlow - Consultant, **tml Partners**



Balancing long-term brand vision with short-term targets

The roundtable discussion kicked off on the topic of strategy. How have FMCG marketing leaders adjusted their strategies in recent times of adversity, including the rising cost-of-living, to meet the needs of their consumers and keep their brand well-positioned?



“We’ve had to become much more agile with added focus on reaching the shopper at the point of purchase, as opposed to the big branding pieces” commented Eleanor Barker, Nomad Foods. This rang true with many other attendees. This isn’t necessarily a shift of responsibility from the Marketing team to Shopper Marketing or Sales teams, but it does emphasise the importance of being able to work together in order to respond quickly to changing consumer needs and market trends. It also highlights the significance of being able to create iterative and flexible campaigns that can be quickly adjusted or optimised based on real-time feedback and results, ultimately creating timely and relevant messaging.

Consumers are making brutal decisions with their shopping lists, electing items that are household essentials and perhaps own label, over more premium priced branded goods. The balance between long-term brand vision and positioning with short-term sales goals has been a challenge in the FMCG industry, but it is not a total shift.



The consensus in the room was that businesses can place emphasis on sales at point-of-purchase and income-generation without losing sight of brand values by ensuring authentic brand messaging, thoughtful product curation, transparent and ethical business practices, engaging storytelling and building customer relationships. *“We’ve made a fundamental decision to not compromise on our sustainability credentials”* added Joanna Botwood, Method. Despite the cost pressures and potential margin increases, sticking to these values can put brands in a strong and buoyant position for when difficult times subside, whilst maintaining and growing a loyal customer base.

A customer-centric approach for long-term success

Steve Monk, Integration Consulting & Good Guys Bakehouse Founder, believes the “*smaller players have a shorter runway, and the big players have more cash at their disposal to acquire*”, and ultimately this should lead to growth in the categories themselves, but it can make it difficult for the smaller players to keep up and take risks. Steve added that “*your point of difference will be imperative to success*” and should remain a priority.

It may require an extra stretch but despite limited resources compared to larger players, by adopting strategies such as niche positioning and differentiation; innovation and agility; strategic partnerships; a customer-centric approach and efficient resource management, smaller players can thrive and succeed.

Joanna added “*brands shouldn't be afraid to shift away from the constant focus on growth, and instead protect your loyal customer base*”. There can be a tendency for new customers to be the holy grail for brands, but it costs five to six times more to attract new customers than to hold on to your current consumer base.

The temptation to throw long-term brand positioning out the window for short-term P&L benefits can be tempting, but by shifting the focus from constant growth to building loyal customer bases, brands can benefit from a sustainable and truly customer-centric approach that encourages repeat business and enhances customer satisfaction. This long-term customer relationship can also be utilised to gather valuable feedback and insights, paving the way for the future of the brand.

Innovating during times of uncertainty

How are FMCG marketing leaders innovating in these times of economic uncertainty? Have projects to protect core ranges been prioritised above longer term initiatives? Eleanor Barker has found white space innovation to be a big ongoing project for her team. *“The category growth will return and we have to be there, ready to utilise new technologies”*.

Innovation can look different to everyone, however. For some brands, the cost-of-living has knocked their products further down the list of priority purchases for consumers, so reviewing channels can be a useful tactic. Will getting your products into Poundland, B&M, or German discount stores help keep the brand in the spotlight as opposed to being in stores that are now considered a luxury to some?

Adrian Mooney added *“in my previous company, Scholl, converting at the point-of-purchase became the priority. Our innovation was to re-address and have promotions and comms that drove people to Amazon, to Boots, to online purchasing”*. Innovation can include channel, price, and packaging. Not just the new technology on the market.

Collecting and synthesising market insights throughout entire organisations, including sales and customer service, as well as marketing functions should be activated as an opportunity to learn what consumers are feeling and needing at every touchpoint in order to recognise new patterns of behaviour. This could give companies a head start in the innovation race.

Naturally, the conversation turned to artificial intelligence and how it's being used in day-to-day marketing activity. However, attendees agreed that a follow-up event would be necessary to take a deep dive into the topic.



Pivoting strategy vs. pivoting skill sets

With many marketing teams having to adjust their strategy overnight to meet the evolving needs of the company and its customers, some of our attendees have gone from an 80:20 brand vision to sales emphasis to a 20:80 brand vision to sales emphasis. But what effect has this had on internal skill gaps and hiring? Charlie Green, Managing Director of tml Partners commented *“there’s a rotating timeline of preference for generalists versus specialists, but the cycle feels shorter than ever, going from 3 to 5 years to 18 month cycles”*.

Joanna has found that the *“profile of people we are looking at has changed, leaning towards the performance marketing side”*. This certainly correlates with the need for a better understanding of consumers as well as driving sales.

Vikaas Saxena, Phillip Morris, added to this: *“our focus has been on ensuring we are equipping our consumer experience team. Understanding which stage of the buyer journey consumers are at, how you move them to the next level, what the pain-points or barriers to adoption are, and then creating omnichannel experiences to drive through the funnel and create a pleasant user experience”*.

The right talent for the right consumer

Adrian Mooney made the point that “*you can pivot strategy, but you can’t pivot people so quickly*”, leaving companies with skill gaps in certain areas. Hiring, and even upskilling to an extent, can be high risk, especially when there’s uncertainty on how a strategy may shift. Jacqueline Ellis-Jones, Pip and Nut, said she’s found it more challenging to recruit the right people in these circumstances.



Certainly it is increasingly important to employ talent that is adaptable and resilient at a variety of levels. There’s also a rise in the desire for [interim marketing professionals](#) who can have an instant impact, especially if a new target is introduced, whilst providing flexibility for the employer.

Corinne Chant, PepsiCo, made the point that staying true to your brand and consistently representing its values can be all-important in attracting the right talent. It helps align candidates with your organisational culture, enhances your employer branding efforts, builds trust and fosters authenticity. A strong employer brand that aligns with your brand values can help attract top talent who are likely to be more engaged, motivated and committed to a company’s success.



Prioritising diversity for the future of marketing

Recruiting amidst potential strategy and wider business changes can be difficult, but how can companies ensure they prioritise diversity when fulfilling increasingly specific job briefs?



A diverse team can bring diversity of thought and a better understanding of core consumers, which has been a priority for Eleanor throughout her career. *“In a previous role for a social-first make-up brand for women of colour, we found that traditional job ads were excluding those that could relate to our brand. We overcame this issue by recruiting through our Instagram page, which attracted candidates with incredible social media skills who understood the brand and the consumer”*. This shows that adapting your hiring practices to mitigate bias and reach those that understand your primary audience can provide multiple benefits beyond creating an inclusive workplace.

Unfortunately, structural barriers to the marketing industry as a career choice do remain, from socio-economic status, ethnic background and religious belief amongst other factors. *“Marketing has a perception issue on gender, race and other components. We have to look at how we represent ourselves and our industry”* commented Savan Sabharwal, Andros.



Charlie Green, tml Partners, added *“one of the biggest challenges from an EDI perspective is data and reporting. You need to showcase and evidence underrepresentation within your organisation before taking positive action”*. A recent report by tml Partners, in collaboration with VERCIDA, Diversity & Inclusion specialists, found that [marketing leads the way in gender diversity, but has a long way to go on ethnic diversity](#), compounded by the lack of data currently available on this issue.

Inclusive Hiring Practices

There are several strategies that marketing leaders and talent teams can start to employ in order to address the balance, from revising job descriptions to ensure they are inclusive and avoid using biased language; expanding recruitment approaches to use alternative channels such as diverse job boards; community organisations; professional organisations and as mentioned above social media platforms.

Companies should also look to upskill recruiters and hiring managers with diversity and inclusion training to raise awareness of unconscious biases and to promote inclusive hiring practices. These could include interviewing techniques and evaluating potential vs. current experience. There is also great value in considering transferable skills that candidates may have gained from other industries or roles, recognising that diversity includes not just race and gender, but also diversity of thought and experience.

tml Partners work closely with specialist ED&I partners such as APSCo and VERCIDA Consulting to develop [best-in-class EDI frameworks](#) and methodologies for all recruitment assignments.

Conclusion

There was plenty left to discuss at the end of this roundtable event, meaning a deeper dive will soon be taken into topics such as MarTech; D&I solutions; and Brand Purpose beyond the bottom line in FMCG.



To discuss these topics further or to be considered for future events, please do get in touch with Emma Calder or Charlotte Brownlow.



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Who are tml Partners?

tml Partners source marketing leaders for the world's most ambitious companies. Harnessing a unique and dynamic approach to recruitment, we are a team of highly experienced marketing recruitment consultants who specialise in finding the right talent to fill senior marketing positions across the globe.

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