

Brand values must be right to fit the nostalgia megatrend

Many major brands are tapping into consumers' desire for nostalgia in uncertain times, but vintage style needs to fit properly, says **Marie Ridgley**, Added Value

IN DIFFICULT TIMES, people hark back to what they trust. It's an emotional response that some companies have sought to capitalise on with the relaunch of food and drink brands from their archive. But how far can nostalgia marketing go?

Cadbury's started the vogue for nostalgia-that-makes-you-feel-better marketing by reintroducing the Wispa bar. Consumers embraced the brand's return so enthusiastically that in December 2008, it was shifting a million bars a week.

Others have since followed in the food and drink category, including ice cream, coffee, custard and burger brands.

In fact, it seems that no category is immune to marketers raiding their back catalogues for formats that can be resurrected. Marketers who have sat on the sidelines while other brands have ridden the nostalgia wave are becoming alarmed.

Bisto gravy celebrated its 100th birthday and saw a 20% rise in sales over a 12-week period. Birds Eye Arctic Rolls have been flying out of supermarket freezer cabinets since their return, with sales of more than three million. Even brands that have not required a revamp, such as Guinness and Hovis, have been enjoying a healthy spike in sales, thanks to retro-styled advertising that eulogises their heritage to connect with consumers' need for homespun, feel-good-again products.

International trend

The nostalgia craze is not confined to the UK. In the US, some of the biggest brand owners, such as General Mills, PepsiCo and Coors, have been reintroducing old formats, as well as rolling out ad campaigns and packaging that evoke the past.

At a recent conference for international brands, almost every marketer wanted to engage in the issue, and almost everyone fielded the same question: 'Are we too late to do nostalgia?'

In broad terms, there are always branding opportunities available in harking back to the past. The salient point is that nostalgia never goes away. If we rolled back the clock five years, we would find different brands to those around us now 'doing nostalgia'. as well as those treat-



The Archetype Game helps companies to decide whether their brand will fit a megatrend, such as nostalgia

ing the phenomenon in different ways.

Nostalgia is an underlying trend, which manifests in a dominant way every three to five years. It is used most effectively by brands when the wider cultural context connects with a relevant brand truth, so that the product seems to have always been destined to fit the zeitgeist of the day and consumers are re-engaged in the brand story.

Now, because of the recession, the cultural context is about thrift and what social commentators such as India Knight call a 'make do and mend' society. Even within this cultural context, the values have shifted very rapidly in the UK over the past six months towards providing warmth, comfort, familiarity and security, as well as a positive pro-British ideology.

On the one hand, we are being offered jam sandwiches by M&S that remind us of happy childhood experiences, while on the other, nostalgia is manifesting itself in more unexpected ways. Sewing, for example, has seen a resurgence in popularity. Fashion designer Paul Smith has taken advantage of this trend by selling fabrics and clothes patterns, enabling people to make their own clothes using high quality textiles.

Consumers trust the heritage, authenticity and inherent truth of nostalgic brand experiences. These qualities are essential if a brand is to engage with consumers through nostalgia. Sewing and jam sandwiches evoke the world of our grandmothers – keeping calm and carry-

ing on, to paraphrase the wartime posters that are currently so popular.

Typefaces that evoke a bygone era are widely used to engage people in diverse issues, from politics (the Barack Obama 'Hope' poster) to shopping (Liberty's Best of British campaign to promote home-grown fashion). But how far can brands stretch the current vogue for nostalgia?

In its current form, perhaps not far. To gain fast traction with consumers through speed to market, a brand needs to fit modern needs to exploit the nostalgia opportunity.

Even successful nostalgia brands need to take care. It seems odd that some old formats (particularly in the food and drink sectors) re-emerge without making the product improvements expected by today's consumers, who tend to want lifestyle choices that do not compromise on nutritional value, taste or quality. You can resurrect a brand, but you cannot leave it the same. And even if you try to wrap it in the glow of nostalgia through design cues and communication, a poor product remains just that. A devalued brand should focus on rebuilding equity before anything else.

The new 'old'

If we are at the peak of this trend, what will be next? Prepare for a new nostalgia. That means organisations must place further emphasis on understanding the broader, surrounding cultural context, and identify and work with the trends that most impact on their brands and their audiences.

We expect nostalgia in the UK to retain its strongly British sensibility, but it is likely to shift away from the dominant trends of 'security' and 'familiarity' and towards 'expressiveness' and 'creativity' as the 2012 Olympic Games approach. The games in London, allied to an economy that is forecast to have recovered its bullishness over the next 12 to 24 months, will drive a new nostalgia that will be more enabling and outer-driven.

In readying for nostalgia, businesses and brands should focus on identifying the truth behind their brand, being clear about the size of the market opportunity

Marie Ridgley is managing director of brand development and marketing insight agency Added Value, which she joined in 2000. Her focus is on brand development thinking for clients such as Twinings and Homebase. Previously, she was marketing manager for Bacardi Rum and Bacardi Breezer at Bacardi Martini UK Ltd. m.ridgley@added-value.com



in their category and ensuring their personality is aligned to consumers' needs and expectations.

Tools such as the Archetype Game provide a unique way of understanding brand personality within the broader cultural context, enabling brands to differentiate themselves more effectively within a megatrend, such as nostalgia.

Archetypes are a simple, objective and universal way of thinking about a personality. We recently carried out a project for a UK brand to identify the personalities of major brands trading on the nostalgia card and help our client to find an authentic, credible expression of nostalgia that fits with the brand story.

We found that brands where the dominant archetype is a 'Nurturer', 'Innocent' or 'Regular Guy' had greater emotional connection with consumers in the current economic climate. Brand examples include Heinz, which celebrates the optimism and simplicity of the past and makes it relevant for today; Hovis, a classic Nurturer, offering the comfort and reassurance of shared experiences; and Walkers, a Regular Guy – a uniting force bringing people together through its Great British flavours campaign,

In the context of nostalgia, the Archetype Game enabled our client to define the character of its brand and carve out a unique and tangible destination for the brand positioning. A brand can have a strong positioning statement, but without character, it will lack soul.

Criteria for nostalgia

If we accept that nostalgia is cyclical, are there any rules of engagement to maximise this megatrend? Our analysis of branding hits and misses (see panel), together with our five questions and principles (below), are designed to help brands seize the nostalgia opportunities.

- 1) Is the market gap sufficient to drive demand both for the short and long term, or has it reached nostalgic saturation?
- 2) Brand authenticity is essential. Draw on your heritage and select carefully from your portfolio to ensure you have 'the right to play'.
- 3) Positive, differentiated brand personal-

Nostalgia branding hits...

Virgin Atlantic The '25 years, still red hot' ad (below) is packed with references to 1980s Britain, from a yuppie with a giant mobile phone to a teen playing Asteroids. It cheekily celebrates the idea that Virgin has long had the sexiest cabin crew of any airline. The message reinforces how Virgin changed the face of airline travel, becoming the first real challenger to BA. The ad



capitalises on Virgin Atlantic's heritage and pioneering spirit, but looks forward. It lifts the viewer from the gloomy times and positions Virgin for when the good times come again.

Wispa An intelligent, creative and original use of social media, with campaigns such as www.fortheloveofwispa.com. The reintroduction resulted in 12 million bars being sold in 12 weeks to December 2008.

Persil Its brilliant 'Tough but gentle for 100 years' outdoor creative uses the iconography of retro children's books to take the brand back to its roots. It reminds customers that the message of being 'tough on dirt and gentle on clothes' is as strong a focus today as it has been for the past century.

...and misses

Little Chef Founded in 1958, the chain today comprises 177 roadside restaurants in the UK. Since 2007, it has been owned by UK private equity group RCapital.

In January this year, millions tuned in to Channel 4 to watch celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal revamp the chain with a new menu and a restaurant refit. RCapital has promised to roll out the new format if this restaurant is in a profit within three months.

However, RCapital is well behind the curve across the rest of the portfolio, with tired menus and restaurant formats. The nostalgia trend offers enormous opportunities to provide affordable, great British grub in a friendly, familiar environment. Little Chefs are in the right place to capture the extra hundreds of thousands of Britons who will be holidaying at home this year. It seems perfectly placed to tap into the well of nostalgia among those of us in our

30s and 40s, with children of our own, who still hold it in affection. It needs to start with tactical store changes (take down posters from last year still advertising 'winter warmers'), freshen up the place and learn from competitors such as M&S to create lighter menus at affordable prices.

EDF. Reviving *Six Million Dollar Man* marked the third phase in EDF's 'It's not easy being green' campaign. The TV ads drew parallels with the energy crisis of the 1970s to highlight how the new EDF product offers cheaper electricity rates to customers at weekends and after 9pm. The only problem is that if you missed phases one and two, the campaign made hardly any sense. According to a new report by *Which?*, there are more than 4,000 different deals available to gas and electricity customers in Britain. Seven out of 10 people surveyed said they found the sheer number of tariffs confusing.

ity is essential to connect with consumers. 4) Always be aware of the broader cultural context and emerging values of the nostalgia megatrend that have the most resonance with your brand or category. 5) Consumers expect high standards of product delivery, whether it is taste or

nutrition in the food and drink sectors, or comfort, cleanliness and excellent service in hospitality and leisure. A retro brand needs 21st century performance.



More on nostalgia marketing at www.warc.com