

The Grocer

Focus On: Ice Cream by Beth Gault (Beth.Gault@wrbm.com)

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The Story

Supermarket sales of ice cream have climbed closer than ever to the £1bn landmark in the past year. What's driven this? Which brands, own label lines and retailers are cashing in on ice cream's growth? How are they doing so? Is anyone being left behind? And what does the coming year have in store for ice cream?

Key themes:

Chocolate snacks: Ice creams defined as 'chocolate snacks', primarily chocolate coated ice cream sticks and ice cream versions of chocolate countlines are still the market's biggest sector and they're in strong growth. This feature will explore the brands, own label manufacturers and retailers that are driving this and how they are using factors like NPD, promotions and advertising to win sales.

Dessert: Ice cream is no longer just about grabbing a cone or a lolly from a forecourt on a hot summer day; manufacturers are looking to establish ice cream as a sophisticated dessert. So who's doing what in this area? And how are consumers eating such products? This feature will include exclusive usage data outlining how consumption patterns are changing.

Kids: Ice creams and lollies aimed specifically at kids are in growth at present. This feature will explore the factors that are driving this and how brands, own label manufacturers and retailers are looking to use factors like NPD, promotions and advertising to drive further growth. How important are licensed products to this sector?

Retailers: This feature will analyse how the different major retailers have approached the category in the past year, with particular attention being paid to branded and own label ranging and product development and space allocation. To what extent has the sector been affected by range rationalisation? What kind of products are retailers prioritising?

Health: This feature will include a separate box out weighing up how the health debate is impacting ice cream, with attention being paid to pledges by manufacturers to reduce the size of ice creams in order to cut calorie count. What is the potential of a scientific breakthrough that allows sugar use to be cut by 40% for ice cream? Is there scope to use sugar alternatives such as stevia, monkfruit or inulin in ice cream? And how are smaller brands tapping the health trend in ice cream?

Discounters: With the discounters stealing growing share of ice cream from the supermarkets, this feature will include an exploration of the product offerings of these retailers and how they are managing to grow at such an impressive rate. What can the mainstream retailers learn from them, other than the need to offer low prices?

The weather and seasonal events: To what extent were ice cream sales affected by the weather last summer, which got off to an overcast start but then basked in two heatwaves? How are players looking to 'de-seasonalise' the sector? Can developing products for seasonal events such as Easter and Christmas help?

Other sectors: This feature will explore all of ice cream's sub sectors, from premium gelato and desserts through to frozen yoghurt and dairy free offerings. Which sectors are tipped for growth in 2017 and what factors are driving this?

Own label: Own label is outgrowing brands. This feature will explore the factors that are leading to this and investigate whether any brands are bucking this overall trend. Another focus will be on how brands' prices are being affected in the battle with own label.

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. *See below.*

Demographics: Our research shows that older people have built significantly more ice cream in the past year. What's driving this? To what extent does ice cream consumption reflect wider changes in society? How else is the demographic make up of ice cream consumers changing and what's driving this change? This will be discussed in a separate box out.

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?