

The Grocer

Focus On: Bottled water by Natalie Brown (Natalie_Brown@live.co.uk)

Publishing: 19 March
Advertising deadline: 26 February
Submissions deadline: 20 February

The Story

Bottle water continues to boom. In fact, it's the fastest growing soft drink sector with take home sales and volumes up. What's driving this growth? Which retailers and brands are cashing in? Has anyone been left high and dry? And what are players doing to sustain the growth?

Key themes:

Health: With the soft drinks industry facing growing criticism from the health lobby and just last week officials vowing to 'carpet bomb' fizzy drinks brands with shock adverts about their sugar content, 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?

Posh water: Analysis suggests that we're paying considerably more for sparkling water than we were a year ago, with the price of sparkling water have grown the most and many premium brands enjoying significant growth. This feature will explore how brands are justifying their average price increases (i.e. through NPD, marketing, etc) and who's driving this premiumisation.

Flavours: A key growth area. This feature will explore which brands and own label players are driving the growth in flavoured bottled water and how. What does the year ahead hold for the flavoured bottled water sub sector? Flavoured sparkling water is lagging behind the rest of the sector in terms of growth? Why? Are drinkers getting wise to some products' high sugar content?

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 2016. We will be profiling four of the most interesting launches in a separate innovation panel.

Promotions: 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.

Enhanced Water: This feature will look at the growing market for enhanced water – that is mineral water fortified with electrolytes, vitamins and minerals to offer greater functionality than merely quenching a thirst. Who's leading this market? How much potential is there for this sector? And do their claims really hold water?

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?