

Bringing back the Tetley Tea Folk

In 2009, Anand Gandesha UK Marketing Manager for Tetley Tea – one of the UK’s leading tea brands – set his agencies a challenge. The brand needed a compelling advertising vehicle that could promote the entire range and drive affinity for the brand rather than individual products. As he explained the challenge, “We were looking to build a greater level of affinity, advertising that latched on to the mother brand as well as driving awareness and trial of our variants.”

Having reviewed the challenge, their longest serving advertising agency suggested bringing back the Tetley Tea Folk. These animated characters had been part of Tetley’s advertising for nearly 30 years from 1973 to 2000, featuring in countless TV campaigns and generating an estimated 30 million pieces of gift with purchase merchandise. Ironically, the decision to cull them a decade ago was partly based on the need for an approach that could be used to promote different emerging variants of tea.

Still loved

Not surprisingly, the agency’s creative suggestions were tested rigorously. Firstly there was a simple on-line study that asked people if they knew the characters and if they felt they were engaging. This quickly identified the Tea Folk comeback as a compelling proposition. Despite an absence of nearly 10 years – 92% of consumers still recognised the Tea Folk and 90% associated them with Tetley. Tellingly, 85% liked or strongly liked them. This feedback led to a detailed qualitative research phase, testing different creative approaches about how to execute the comeback.

Finally the decision was made to invest £9M in a large scale PR, Advertising, and Digital execution that reached over 42 million viewers for a 10 week period in Autumn 2010. The goal, according to Gandesha, was to “get consumers to fall back in love with the Tetley Tea Folk and the Tetley brand.” This would drive customer affinity leading to loyalty, love, greater awareness and more trial of a broader range of teas.

The role of licensing

Even before the characters comeback was in play, licensing was something that featured in the Tetley marketing team’s armoury. An independent T-shirt manufacture was sought out to license

the original characters and imagery on to a range of T-shirts. Using the PR agency’s connections a range of celebrities were then snapped for the press wearing the T-shirts. This

was a precursor to the main marketing activity and drove the character’s heritage back into consumer consciousness without actually announcing they were coming back.

Having had some experience of licensing when he worked on the McVities cake licensed products while at Mars Confectionary, Gandesha knew that “licensing was always something we wanted to do but, due to workload, it was put on hold until the second year: Trying to get licensed products listed right at the beginning was challenging.”

After the first burst of marketing investment had led to the Tea Folk’s comeback being acclaimed as one of Marketing Magazine’s top 10 events of 2010, the Tetley marketing team reached out to three different Licensing Agencies. The decision to use a Licensing Agency was made right at the beginning of the campaign because Tetley was looking for a resource with:

- Specialist knowledge about which deals to do, who to approach and why
- Knowledge of likeminded licensees with aligned objectives

For Tetley, unlike traditional entertainment brands, “Licensing was not just about generating income. In fact,” emphasized Gandesha, “the aim was to deliver scale as quickly as possible. We were looking to create licensed products that build and enhance the Tetley tea making occasion.”

Critically, there was senior-level approval for the concept of a licensing program but this desire was checked with a very real concern that the right rules and procedures were followed. “A licensed Tea Folk branded product effectively represents us,” cautioned Gandesha, “everyone could see the commercial reasons to do it, not just because of the additional revenue but also



because it could drive sales of tea.” Within the enthusiasm there was a concern about “following due diligence in the same way we would when producing our own products.”

Appointing an agency

Finally, in January 2011, with the characters attracting over 100,000 Facebook friends only three months after the first comeback advertising appeared on television, the time was right to start looking for a Licensing agency. The decision was based on the chosen agency’s pitch, their track record, their chemistry, the strategy they developed and their vision for the next three years. Antonia Habdank-Toczyska, Account Director at Golden Goose brand licensing consultancy, was understandably “delighted to be working with a corporate brand that is serious about licensing. Our whole ethos is that strong brands can use licensing to help achieve their marketing objectives.”

Chemistry and shared values between the agency and the client proved to be vital, “what we want is for the agency to be an extension of us, representing our brand,” concluded Gandesha when asked about the most important attribute of the agency.

The first role of the agency was to develop a licensing strategy that would help the internal sell and cement the role licensing was going to play. In addition the strategy provided a filter process for choosing products and licensees. “I wouldn’t have had any internal sign-off without a strategy in place” explained Gandesha. “From the agency’s perspective,” Habdank-Toczyska continued “the strategy piece allowed us to get to know the relevant people within the organization and to road-test our vision for the entire licensing program with potential licensees. It also meant that we could accelerate quickly once the strategy was signed off.”



Executing the strategy

By November 2011, only 6 months after the strategy was approved – six new Tetley products had been successfully launched. These included a range of homewares and giftwares and also edible products. Three focus groups had instantly grasped the appeal of tea specific items such as mugs, caddies, teaspoons or items used at breakfast or tea time.

“We found that the Tetley Tea Folk were at the center of three trends: Great British products, Tea Time Gifting, and a love for all things retro,” enthused Habdank-Toczyska. “This meant that we were able to move very quickly with our chosen partners in ceramics because retailers were receptive to the brand and the opportunity.”

Cautious approach

Perhaps because of the number of variables involved, both Tetley and the focus groups were more cautious about the idea of launching Tetley Tea Folk food items. The scone that was ultimately chosen to launch the food licensing program was the result of a number of iterations with tea-flavored scones being tested during the NPD process. Brand guidelines were developed so that all Tetley Tea Folk products would be recognizably familiar and the packaging development process was carefully monitored. In addition, Tetley’s own quality assessment person carried out an audit of the food licensee’s production facilities to ensure that they were comfortable with the manufacturing of the products. In fact, Gandesha cites this process as one of the most important in the whole licensing program, “we treat them like a co-manufacturer. We have to be rigorous in terms of testing.”

The scone, which launched in 330 Asda stores in September, was quickly followed with three variants of a dunking biscuit that launched to retail in November. Both product launches were promoted to the trade in *The Grocer* magazine and also via the Facebook Group with almost unanimously positive feedback.

Galvanizing through licensing

With the gifting ceramics established in 600 Tesco stores as one of their leading gift products, the higher end ceramics about to appear in retailers such as Debenhams,

and the food products appearing in all branches of Asda and in the impulse sector, Gandesha is very pleased, “as of mid-November we’ll have six products on-shelf with

two more to follow over the next 3 months, I didn’t expect that to be the case...given that you have to work with licensees with different time scales we’ve been really pleased to have developed these quality products in a short space of time.”

The real test will be if the result is the increase in sales of tea so, has this been the result? “It’s very difficult to say that in the first 10 months,” responds Gandesha with refreshing honesty, “it will be easier to answer in the second year.” He remains positive on the outlook, however, “the great thing licensing does is provide longevity, some of the licensed products being sold now will last for 10 years.”

One surprising outcome of the licensing program has been how well it engaged employees internally and excited them about the new developments, with licensing cited as a way of “galvanizing the organization.”

The future

The licensing program required relatively limited input from senior management but it did need marketing, procurement and legal resources to be available to help steer through the complexities of the program.

Having gained the momentum and learnings from the first few licensees, however, the resource required looks set to reduce. “Once the program is up and running it requires less time and effort for new licensees to come on board,” advises Gandesha. “The agency becomes a trusted extension of the organization and the team and they will be more empowered to filter licensees and opportunities.”

He adds “the challenge is getting the program moving, after which I hope to achieve is significant success and scale will follow.”

Based on the agency’s forecasts, this scale and success are getting closer as the exciting products in the pipeline include bakery and cake food products, and a broader range of collectables. ■

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Taking the biscuit

For Tetley, the aim when launching a new tea folk product, was to ensure that it achieved standout within its category so that it was genuinely differentiated rather than a “me too” product with a logo on it.



It was at the IFE trade fair in March 2011 that Yorkshire bakery Grandma Wild’s were first approached by Golden Goose to discuss the opportunity to develop a Tea Folk biscuit. Serendipitously, the company had, some ten years ago, made some biscuits in the shape of the “Gaffer” character for Tetley and they still had the original mould. Grandma Wild’s is a family business in its fourth generation that makes some private label biscuits and has won awards for its own branded range but had not developed a brand beyond its own territory.

“What made Grandma Wild’s stand out was the quality of their biscuits and their passion for baking,” said Gandesha. “They may not be the largest biscuit manufacturer in the UK, but they were dedicated to getting the product right.”

In practical terms, that meant developing a wide range of biscuits for tasting by Tetley’s internal team. “At one point,” recalled Gandesha, “they were nervous about the amount of ginger in the ginger biscuit, but we pushed them to make it quite spicy as we knew this would appeal to our target audience.” The final product ‘Gaffer’s Biscuits’ come in three flavours of Choc Chip, Golden Crunch and Ginger. Sold in packs of 6 the biscuits will be available for a promotional price of £1.00 until December 4, after which they will have a recommended selling price of £1.49.

“These are great tasting biscuits which are perfect for dunking,” confirmed Gandesha, Marketing Manager for Tetley. “Tea is a top three top up item in convenience stores so it makes sense to have this range of biscuits available there to partner a good cup of Tetley tea.”