

Kitchen table to £100m brand: six marketing lessons from Ella's Kitchen

Author : Nicola Kemp

Date : May 13, 2015



Paul Lindley, founder of Ella's Kitchen, successfully took the brand from his kitchen table to become the biggest baby food brand in the UK.

He is a trained accountant, has no traditional marketing experience, yet has successfully built the UK's best-selling baby food brand, with an annual turnover of over £100m. In our household, ruled by a willful, exuberant and supremely energetic toddler, Paul Lindley is something of a rock god, particularly as the creator of 'The Red One', the healthy smoothie that can be consumed on the go. But you don't need to be a fan of his products to admire the trajectory of the brand.

Having successfully conquered the nation's Kitchen's Lindley is now turning his attention to our bathrooms with the launch of 'Paddy's Bathroom'. The toiletries brand for toddlers will have a strong social ethos, with the brand donating a drop of clean water to children in Rwanda for every drop of water used by people washing with its products.

Here are the six marketing lessons from the phenomenal rise of the Ella's Kitchen brand

1. Build a brand on value

"If you build a brand based on values then you can articulate why you are doing what your doing. It allows you to have a clear message and employ people with lots of passion. Values allow you to have consistency in everything from recruitment to marketing," explains Lindley.

2. Great brands grow from the inside out

The advertising industry loves nothing more than waxing lyrical about the art of storytelling. Yet, while Ella's Kitchen is indeed built on a great story (Lindley's daughter Ella was a fussy eater and the recipes were made for her) the story is completely true. "Your brand is the way you live as a business not just how you communicate," explains Lindley.

In an age where agencies are heavily promoting a content marketing agenda, marketers need

to stop and ask themselves is this storytelling venturing into the realms of fairytales or based on fundamental brand truths?

3. Be consumer obsessed

You won't hear Paul Lindley advocating the power of big data. "We didn't have the budgets for lots of data so we had to understand mums from a human perspective," explains Lindley.

Ella's Kitchen also takes a slightly unconventional view of reaching its intended target audience. Instead of joining the hoards of brands marketing to mums Lindley set its sights firmly on toddlers. "Learn to think like a toddler," he advises "they are the most creative, they are honest and most of all they have fun."

Whilst he acknowledges this approach is harder to implement as a brand manager at a major company. (Much as many would love nothing than to indulge in a total meltdown or an attack of extreme honesty). He believes this approach can drive a small business through the good times and the bad.

Indeed Ella's Kitchen's most successful brand the smoothie called 'The Red One' was the result not of an army of consultants, or a myriad of advertising agencies on heart-stopping retainers, but the thoughts of his then 4 year-old son.

4. Actively find something to stand for

While there is no doubt that the recession has had a significant impact on consumers' purchasing habits Lindley believes that ethics are just as much a selling point as brand or price. "Good business makes for a better world but also makes business sense," he explains.

5. Never stand still

Having sold the Ella's Kitchen brand to US food giant Hain Celestial in 2013 Lindley continues to expand the brand. In addition he has his sights set on the toddler toiletries market with the launch of Paddy's Bathroom. Again he is taking on the market leaders Johnson & Johnson and L'Oreal and hoping to have the same disruptive impact.

6. You are never too small to make a difference

In the face of fierce competition, ever-decreasing budgets and the complexities of media fragmentation it is all too easy for marketers to feel they can't make a difference. Lindley cites the late Anita Roddick who famously declared; "If you think you are too small to have an impact try going to bed with a mosquito."

Paul Lindley was speaking at this week's Mumstock conference in London.