

The Grocer

Focus On: Sports & Energy drinks by Daniel Selwood (daniel.selwood@thegrocer.co.uk)

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The Story

The sector's top four brands have turned in some of the most impressive performances in fmcg in the past year, despite growing anti-sugar sentiments and calls for regulation, delivering combined growth of £36m. How? And what does this year have in store? But Brits drank fewer litres of the stuff last year; with value only inching up.

Key themes

Branding: The sports & energy drinks market is home to some of grocery's most powerful brands; they command prices way above the market average and have defied the deflation gripping grocery. How are they doing it? A quick scan of the brands' social media feeds would suggest a steady stream of extreme sports and scantily clad women is key, but surely there's more to it than that?

Energy drinks and health: This feature will explore in detail the extent at which the energy drinks market has been impacted by growing concern around sugar, looking at sales data for low and no sugar product variants and so-called 'natural energy' drinks. How is the sugar debate likely to shape this market in the coming year?

'Natural' energy: The formula for energy drinks has been pretty simple in the past: sugar, caffeine and/or taurine. But now brands are using a widening array of exotic ingredients to add weight to their claims, from ginseng and green tea to guarana and sea buckthorn; some are even removing added sugar from the recipe. How much potential is there in the UK for such products? Will they help drive future growth? Are the big energy drinks brands looking at this?

Sports drinks: Sports drinks continue to struggle, as drinkers switch to products perceived as more 'natural' and offering greater functional benefits to sportspeople, including bottled and tap water. This feature will analyse the performance of sports brands, with particular attention paid to high profile marketing campaigns of the past year, NPD, price and promotions.

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.

Formats: In the wider soft drinks market, many have unveiled a host of new formats over the past year, designed to hit specific price points and suit particular retail channels and occasions. This feature will explore how much of an opportunity there is for sports and energy drinks to innovate in terms of formats. Who's leading the way?

Flavours: This feature will explore in detail how the flavour of sports & energy drinks is evolving through new product development. What will be the hot new flavour trends of 2015 and how are brands looking to cash in?

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.

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?