The Grocer

Focus On: Infant Care by Natalie Brown (natalie_brown@live.co.uk)

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The Story

Baby food is back on the menu. Brits have splashed out an additional £18.6m on food for their little darlings over the past year, with impressive volume sales as well. A stark contrast to a year ago when the sector was being battered in the health debate as the sugar content of food and drink for babies comes under growing scrutiny. So, how have brands and retailers turned this around? Who's winning and who's losing? Meanwhile, growth in milk and healthcare is nearly eradicated by poor performance in nappies and wipes. Why is this?

Key themes:

Baby food: Baby food has turned itself around. How? Have brands and retailers sought to reduce sugar in their ranges? Are they targeting an all-natural approach? Who has seen the biggest gains and who is still losing out?

Healthcare: Infant healthcare is booming. Which products and brands are driving this?

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.

Nappies: Nappies continue their downward trend. Although it appears to be a severe decline in average price driving its performance as volume increases. Why is this? What strategies are brands and retailers putting in place to help push the market back into value growth?

Own label: Own label is growing faster than brands, securing value and volume growth – a turnaround from a year ago. Why? Are retailers focusing more on their own label ranges? How are ranges overall changing? And what part to the discounters have to play in this?

Price/promotions: Prices in infant care static overall but this varies greatly across sub-categories with nappies down 9.4% while baby milk is up 14.4%. How come? What is driving these major price changes? And, what effect is it having on the sub categories' value?

Retail share: The discounters are storming ahead but it is Aldi who is truly winning. How is it achieving such growth? How is Lidl performing in contrast? What about the mults? How has their focus on this category changed this year?

Advertising and marketing: This feature will also investigate how the marketing and advertising strategies of the category's biggest players 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?