



INK'S GETTING SEXY!

Break-throughs in ink technology are set to drive growth in this sector for 2004!

BY JANE SMITH

Just like car manufacturers, big brand writing instruments companies have been grabbing attention and brand share by re-shaping, re-styling and re-launching their models. Whilst design and style is important so is performance break-throughs in ink technology is set to drive growth in this sector for 2004.

The innovation and investment has been quite amazing with great new products coming on to the market.

Pilot is using a new gel ink formulation that stays erasable forever. Great for exam papers and school essays! Called Erase-a-Gel this product does exactly what it says on the barrel. The ink technology allows text to be rubbed out and changed if needed.

Pentel have developed a new low viscosity ink that writes as smoothly as liquid ink but lasts as long as a gel product. Called Energel, this new range is cost effective too because the fins needed to control the ink feed on a liquid ink product are not needed because the new ink is slightly thicker and behaves more like a gel. This keeps the cost down.

Both companies and many of their competitors are bringing much more to market. We also spoke to Eberhard Rudel, Technical Marketing in Nurnberg for Staedtler. He agrees that ink technology is very important and went on to say, "We, for example, have new inks for text markers which are inkjet safe." The list here could be endless and the innovation is amazing. It really is worth taking a good look around.

This combination of ink technology and technological

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innovation in pen designs has not passed the consumer by either. They have become increasingly aware and research has shown that they are prepared to pay for superior writing quality and better performance. While there will always be a market for unbranded and/or low priced product the current trend is to trade up. *Are you taking advantage of this?*

As with all things in life it is a balance. The right mix of products will provide the best long-term sales success. Make sure you know the

best sellers for each sector eg Pilot's G-2 is shown to be the best selling retractable Gel rollerball pen. Talk to manufacturers to find out what new and innovative products are being launched and find out more about the technical aspects of the range. This will then give you the right information to demonstrate the benefits of different products to customers. And don't forget the liquid ink sector of the rollerball pen market as it has not suffered from price erosion or over-supply. This sector grew last year with higher average selling prices than gel products. Finally keep cash margin firmly in your mind. Sometimes you can achieve more cash from the sale of one brand leading pen against selling three alternative or unbranded pens. **Good luck with your liquid assets!** ■

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