



Mark

OUR WORDS!

Let's hear no more about the 'humble' marker, it's a hero!

BY JANE SMITH

The 'markers' market in the business-to-business (B2B) sector is worth £16.5m and showing no growth, while in the retail sector it is worth £8.5m and showing slight growth (source GfK, MAT, Sept 2003).

Measured across Permanent Markers, Highlighters and Dry Wipe Markers, we talked to manufacturers to find out more about this small, but still significant sector. There's no doubt that it's tough out there for this category but the major players are responding with new product development, sampling campaigns and heavily promoting use at the consumer level.

Bic is an example of this. Emma Lawley spoke to us and explained that although the category is static and

only growing slightly in retail, it was still important to innovate and promote the category. She told us, "It doesn't help that the category is so confusing. It's very fragmented and difficult for the consumer to understand. So what we're doing is refocusing our range by identifying the need, matching the product to fit the need and then communicating that in simple to understand terms. Take the CD marker. This has been the highest growth category for everyone in 2003. This is because the need to label CDs is increasing but, more importantly, the product is specifically communicated as meeting a clear need. This needs to be done more."

GET A GRIP!

Last year Bic launched a new Grip

Marker range. Says Lawley, "It was designed for heavy duty use and features a unique rubber barrel. When used in warehouses, factories and outdoors, research had shown that other markers on the market were not perceived to be heavy duty enough. Another advantage of the grip marker is that the rubber barrel means it will not slip or become uncomfortable in wet or humid conditions."

Here at USP we thought it was interesting to see the pocket clip back again. This is a feature that disappeared some years ago when everybody was de-specifying product to hit a price point. However, added value and a solution to a problem is what we're hearing people are looking for. In a warehouse, factory and outdoor situations a clip is really important

to be able to safely store the marker in between use.

'Cap off time' used to be a big issue as well, but today that is a thing of the past as all manufacturers have developed special inks that form a seal over the end of the nib to stop the marker drying out when the cap is left off. Today 'cap off times' are now more like 4 weeks than 4 minutes!

Staedtler is another big name in the marker category, with a heritage of reliable drawing and technical pens and equipment. Their brand Lumocolor is well known to us all and celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. The Lumocolor range consists of permanent and non permanent multi-purpose pens and markers. A recent newcomer to the range is the Lumocolor Permanent Special, suitable

for special applications such as writing or marking Teflon and nano-treated surfaces. For example in the optometry field spectacle glass with a scratch-resistant, easy clean coating is used.

The Lumocolor Permanent Special is currently the only fine marker worldwide which remains smudge-proof and waterproof when used on such surfaces. Mike Bird, Staedtler's director of sales and marketing, told us, "Lumocolor is now the brand we use for all our markers and penstyle markers. This gives us the widest possible range of marking products. The latest addition is the Compact Marker, introduced to fill the gap between a penstyle width barrel and a marker width barrel."

All of this is backed by a large scale sampling campaign designed to get consumers to trial the product.

OVER HERE, MATE!

We spoke to Sanford to find out what they're doing with their range of Paper Mate Sharpie products, another well-known brand in the marker sector. Sanford told us about their range extensions for 2004, Paper Mate Sharpie Twin Tip and Super Twin Tip. Like the name says they have two tips – one each end – designed with convenience and versatility in mind. Both products provide a choice of line widths combined in one marker. Paper Mate Sharpie Grip is also new and features a soft rubber grip for optimal comfort and a liquid ink system. Finally Paper Mate New Look Sharpie Fine now available in a range of vibrant colours such as orange, purple, berry and turquoise as well as the more conventional colours.

James Faulkner, Sanford marketing manager says: "In America the Sharpie name is used as the generic for a permanent marker and we feel there is the potential for that to happen here."

Mitsubishi Uni, Pilot and Pentel too are no exception when it comes to new product development,

innovation and hefty marketing campaigns.

Wendy Vickery, marketing manager for Pentel explained their latest and new innovation. The first fully retractable permanent marker. Called the NX5, Pentel believe this opens up a new category for dealers and retailers to exploit and provides a new profit opportunity too. Coming from the same stable as brand leaders as the N50 and M180 this product features a fully retractable tip with tip protector to reduce the risk of drying out and a safety lock mechanism to produce clothes and surfaces from being marked accidentally. Cross between a marker and a pen with a medium bullet tip it's both easy to use and store. Again, this product features a pocket clip which is a great feature for users on the move.

NOVEL IDEAS

Finally, never let it be said that we don't find the quirky stuff too! Novelty pens encourage flagging habit? When we saw this line we had to ask more. Well, turns out that in true innovative style Post-it has added diversity to the pen/marker sector offering dealers a novel opportunity to sell a pen that actually incorporates mini Post-it notes on the barrel with resulting sales growth in Post-it Index!

So you see, there are lots of new ideas and product solutions to talk about. In a mature sector such as this one, it would be easy to settle for the sales you already have. But, take a few moments to check out your account base and you could find some extra sales. Do you have any industrial, agricultural or manufacturing companies you supply? Do you work with any laboratories or technical companies that need to mark product? An added value solution here could improve the profitability of the account.

Come to that, perhaps targeting prospective companies on your patch with this kind of idea could work? Definitely something to think about. ■

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