

HOW TO...

HOW TO...

GET FRESH

Breathe new life into a stable category

JOHN BARKER,
MARKETING MANAGER, HELIX

In a crowded market, high quality, usable products which meet customer's demands are vital ingredients in staying competitive. Discount policies and promotions may win sales, but for a business to grow there must be an ongoing programme of product development and innovation.

The power of innovation should not be underestimated. Look at what Dyson did for the humble vacuum cleaner, or the iPod for personal music players. If successful, an innovative product can revolutionise a market.

It is worth remembering however, that while creativity and originality are the cornerstones of innovation, for a new product to be successful, the customer and their demands should always be at centre stage. Getting to know and understand the category and the customer through a comprehensive programme of research is the only way to ensure that there is a need in the marketplace for your product.

For well established – even stale – categories, the introduction of a new and innovative product can provide an opportunity for growth. Take staplers for example. Originally developed in the 1870's, the stapler has become an indispensable office stationery item, racking up an impressive £68,000 in sales every working day in the UK alone. Yet aside from an update to its spring mechanism in the 1930s and various colour, shape and capacity changes, the stapler has suffered from a lack of real innovation. Sales are healthy, but with the only main differentiation being aesthetic, purchasing decisions are naturally made on price, which brings little opportunity for category growth.

For too long, staplers have suffered from being seen as a low cost, commodity product. In 2003, Helix began a programme of research and development to re-energise and grow a category that we felt offered huge potential.



To really add value we needed to maximise innovation. Our research suggested that customers too had been suffering from the stapler's lack of change. The core mechanism had never been significantly updated and users were still straining to staple papers together using sheer brute force – we've all had an experience where we've practically sprained a wrist trying to force the staple through too many sheets.

By applying innovation, and changing the mechanism of the stapler, we have been able to create a new product, Power Touch – which fires staples rather than pushes them through paper, allowing for easier stapling of more sheets of paper, simply through the touch of a finger.

The research identified the issue, the problem was taken onboard and a new product has been designed specifically to meet our customers' wishes. The creation of a product is only the beginning, however. A programme of testing, reviewing and refining must be completed and, for any business embarking on a new product launch, further investment in new business processes and marketing must be made. It is only with a channel and distribution strategy in place that you can make the move from mind to market. But by adding innovation you can create a niche position – premium products with a real user benefit at sensible prices. ■

For more information, see www.helix.co.uk

TOP TIPS

>> 1.

**RESEARCH YOUR CUSTOMERS
AND CATEGORY TO FIND
NEW WAYS OF APPROACHING
THE MARKET**

>> 2.

**SHOW YOUR CLIENTS THAT
YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT THEIR
NEEDS AND MEETING THEM**

>> 3.

**BE CREATIVE, BE ORIGINAL,
THINK BIG AND INNOVATE!**