

# SODA WITH SOUL

DALSTON'S SODA CO.  
DBA DESIGN EFFECTIVENESS AWARD  
FOR PUBLICATION

**B&B**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the story of how effective brand design helped transition Dalston Cola – a niche hand-made and London-centric soda brand born in 2013 – into The Dalston's Soda Co – a real contender within the UK carbonates market, able to challenge both its mainstream and premium competitors by pioneering a new 'craft soda' sub-category.

At its heart is an understanding of how design can help turn vision into reality. From a business perspective, the brand's metamorphosis involved both emotional upheaval and financial risk: the Dalston's brand was built around its hand-made claim, but to achieve any significant commercial growth the business would need to evolve from that labour-intensive process, change its entire manufacturing process and transition in format from bottles to cans. The challenge for the brand was two-fold: first, risk losing an existing customer base made up of local independent shops, bars and restaurants who had bought into the hand-made claim; and secondly, compete in a mainstream carbonates market dominated by global giants.

Brand design has been fundamental in meeting those twin challenges and extends way beyond the can design. An evolved brand identity, personality and messaging has successfully shifted the brand's focus from 'hand-made' to 'made with real fruit' across all brand touchpoints, while strongly communicating its ethical values and community roots. And design has enabled the transition into cans with powerful new packaging that has helped win listings across UK supermarkets. This successful coupling of vibrant and accessible packaging with purposeful and values-driven messaging has helped Dalston's carve out a new sector within carbonates that is resonating with buyers **REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA.**

Launched in April 2018, the reformulated and refreshed range comprised six soda flavours, and its success led to the introduction a year later of a new range of no added sugar seltzers. Once hand-delivered to independent East London restaurants, Dalston's is now stocked nationally in over 4000 retail, food service and on-trade outlets and is distributed to six international markets.

## THE HEADLINES:

**217%**

**sales growth  
year on year**

smashing the brand's  
target of 100% growth  
more than twice over  
**REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA.**

**rate of sales  
in stores  
on average**



**of the big  
supermarkets**

as well as headline food  
service outlets such as  
Benugo, Pure and Abokado.



someone in the UK is  
drinking a Dalston's!

## BEFORE



## AFTER



# CASE STUDY CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

## PROJECT BRIEF

### BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

- Successfully transition the brand from bottles to cans
- Grow the brand by 100% within 1 year, REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA
- Broaden distribution and gain the brand's first supermarket listings

### BUSINESS CHALLENGE

The business challenge driving the brief was a desire to restructure the business and reformulate the product to achieve commercial growth in mainstream retailers without compromising the ethical values at the heart of the brand. To achieve this, the design needed to support the business strategy of REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA that felt relevant to supermarket buyers and would resonate with a new generation of consumers.

### SCOPE OF WORK

The brief included a strategic review of the brand, a new brand positioning and creative strategy, a refreshed visual identity, revised messaging and brand world development across social media and brand activity, and the creation of new packaging design. A single agency undertook the entire process.



## DESCRIPTION

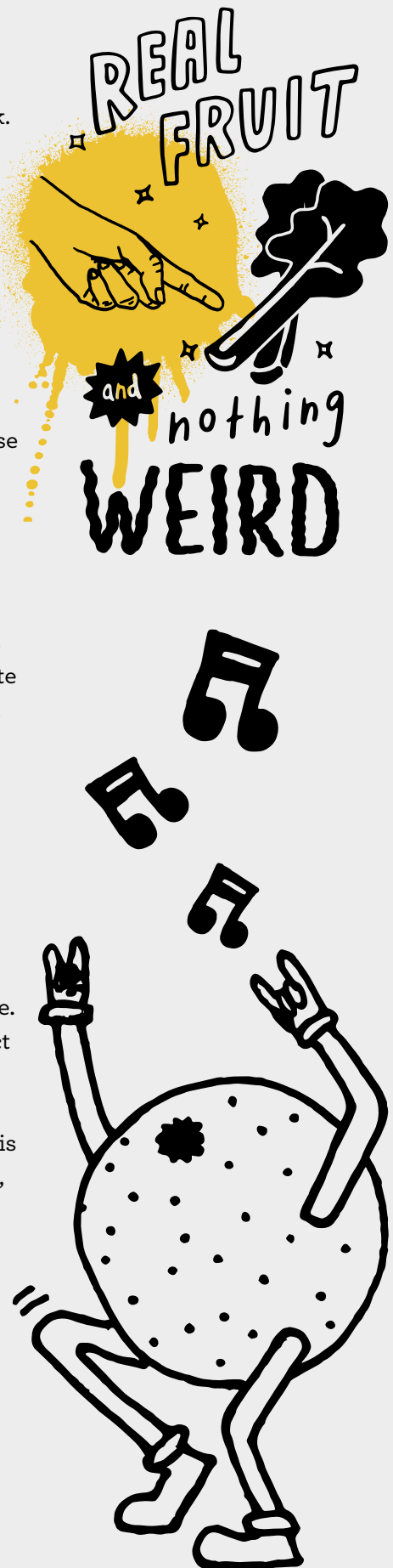
Born in Dalston, East London, in 2012 **REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA** Dalston Cola was founded by chef Duncan O'Brien with the mission to make uniquely tasty drinks by hand, using real and locally sourced ingredients, no added sugar and absolutely no junk.

The brand achieved initial success in local bars, restaurants and independent shops, and was quickly noticed by influential chefs and foodies who were keen to stock the drinks. Hand-made and hand-bottled at its own East London brew yard, the brand was able to grow from three bottled flavours to five, but its labour-intensive means of production limited any further development.

In 2017, the difficult decision was taken to rethink production, reinvent the liquid and reissue the brand in cans in order to catalyse new opportunities for growth. Although the soda would no longer be made by hand, it would be made using only real ingredients, with up to a third less sugar than comparable brands, and with recipes developed in-house from scratch by chef founder Duncan.

The brand development project was a reunion for Dalston's and its existing agency, who had previously helped the brand communicate its 'hand-made' message through brand identity and bottle design. The new project built on some of those existing equities while evolving the brand's focus towards real fruit, craft codes and a bolder brand identity more suited to a supermarket shelf.

The can structure was introduced using bold and vibrantly fruity colourways, enabling the development of a core range of six flavours. Striking multipacks, made from recyclable card rather than shrink-wrap, are a key canvas for the new values-driven messaging, portrayed in a progressive graphic and illustrative style. The brand's evolved personality and voice has imbued every aspect of the rebrand from packaging to social media to campaigns, and highlights the brand's community-focused ethos, its East London origins and its young, switched-on consumers. Connecting with this fickle audience, which demands authentic personality, provenance, and a clear point of view from the brands they buy into, has been key to the rebrand's success.





## MARKET OVERVIEW

- The UK soft drinks market overall grew by 7.7% (value) over 2018, according to Nielsen Scantrack.

The carbonates sector is in good growth – increasing by 9.85% over the same period – but is still hugely dominated by REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA global brands like Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Fanta. These three brands grew by 12.5%, 13.4% and 17.4% respectively over 2018, and have a combined brand value of £1.4 billion, representing 74% of the entire UK carbonates market. At a closer price point to Dalston's, established global brand San Pellegrino represents the premium tier in carbonates, and grew 6% over 2018.

For Dalston's to even consider moving from its protected niche marketplace into this saturated environment was an audacious David vs Goliath move; to succeed within it is testament to the brand's ability to stand out among the world's best known brands.

## KEY FACTS

The Dalston's redesign was launched in cans in April 2018 across six core soda flavours, and a new range of seltzers was introduced in April 2019. Design fees for the original design refresh and can range, not including production, REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA.





# RESULTS

## SUPER SALES GROWTH

In the year following the rebrand, **REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA**. This, of course, includes a core range change from five SKUs to six SKUs, but beats the sales target of a 100% increase **REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA** more than twice over.

And the brand has not plateaued. **REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA** The brand's sales value is forecast to double by 2020. **REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA**



## INCREASE IN DISTRIBUTION

Broadening Dalston's distribution, whilst retaining existing consumers, was a key objective for the redesign and it has been instrumental in enabling Dalston's to maximise its potential in the multiples. Since launch, the brand has won listings in Waitrose, Ocado, Sainsbury's and Asda. Moreover, big wins have come through food service and on-trade, including Brakes, Mathew Clark, Benugo, Pure, Abokado, Mitchels & Butlers, Stone Gate, Co-Op Local, Boston Tea Party and You Me Sushi. Crucially too, Dalston's has retained its presence within existing stockists. The brand re-design - both on and beyond packaging - reinforces Dalston's ethical, sustainable and community philosophy, reassuring independent shop and restaurant owners that the brand's values haven't changed. Dalston's is now stocked in over 4000 retail, food service and on-trade outlets right the way across the UK - an increase of 100% pre-rebrand, from 2,000 to 4,000.



big wins through  
food service



stockists

"Dalston's has always been a great seller for JD's and we have worked well as a team from the outset. Since the rebrand and addition of new SKUs sales have rocketed beyond expectation and are topping sales in this particular category within our current portfolio"

Tom Demetriou - JD's Food Group

"Sales have increased by a steady 20% week on week in the first 3 months of relaunch, this is due to the rebrand and range change Dalston's have gone through in 2018. They categorise as part of 5% total of sales for the drinks category through our Markets."

Simona Rosano - Sourced Market



## CHALLENGING THE COMPETITION

Dalston's transition into cans set it up against a host of more established competitors, but its rate of sale now matches or outperforms them. REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA

## ENABLING INNOVATION

The success of the rebrand has empowered the brand to launch a whole new product range six months ahead of schedule. The seltzer range, launched in April 2019, comprises two SKUs made with no added sugar for a lighter soda alternative. The brand has further NPD in the pipeline across different beverage categories based on strong retailer interest.



## CSR & SUSTAINABILITY

The creation of cardboard multipacks as opposed to the usual plastic wrap was an obvious sustainable choice for a brand whose reputation is built on ethics. While the move into cans was made primarily for brand and business reasons, it does equate to a smaller carbon footprint than glass bottles. Dalston's is currently supporting the "A Plastic Planet" campaign that is working for plastic-free supermarket aisles, and is well on its way towards B Corp certification in recognition of its ethical commitments to employees, suppliers, customers, community and the environment.

## MAKING SODA HEALTHY

It's worth noting that all Dalston's drinks are exempt from the sugar levy introduced in 2018, and contain up to a third less sugar than comparable brands. The brand's craft soda positioning is also helping change perceptions of the soft drinks category, attracting values-driven premium and health-conscious consumers who would have previously avoided artificial and sugar-laden fizzy drinks.

## BRAND WORLD BUZZ

Dalston's highly desirable personality and design has transformed the brand's social media output and captured the imagination of consumers, with over 5,000 engaged followers now regularly interacting with the brand on social and 1,000 subscribers to the quarterly newsletter. Consumers are quickly becoming the brand's own marketeers through real brand love, loyalty and advocacy.

It has also become a brand that other brands are keen to be associated with. Over the past 18 months, Dalston's has been invited to collaborate with Urban Outfitters, Halo Top, Black Cow Vodka, East London Liquor Company and Dr Martins.



## OTHER INFLUENCING FACTORS

Dalston's rebrand covered the majority of its marketing touchpoints – from packaging to social media to branded collateral for guerrilla sampling campaigns. As a small challenger, Dalston's relies on its on-shelf presence to encourage trial and build brand awareness, and press and PR coverage has been solely organic, with mentions in The Guardian, The Grocer and Beast Magazine resulting from a great brand design that highlights Dalston's authentic challenger story. Dalston's promotional strategy is modest – a 25% discount over four months per year in order to reward existing consumers and build loyalty rather than drive new sales.

It could be argued that the transition into cans alone could've achieved the same results without a change in design. However, this would be to overlook the strength of the rebrand beyond packaging and its impact beyond the supermarket shelf. In addition, the rebrand's successful repositioning of Dalston's from a niche hand-made product to an accessible craft soda has resonated significantly with supermarket buyers.

The brand partnerships that Dalston's has achieved with loved brands like Dr Martin's amongst the others mentioned, could be said to have positively affected the success of the brand. However, these were localised initiatives and represent the kind of low investment marketing activity that the brand relies upon. Importantly, these partnerships were only achieved due to the appeal of the Dalston's brand itself.

It could be argued that Dalston's is benefiting from a growing trend for adult soft drinks caused by ongoing changes in UK drinking culture. However, the adult soft drinks market is complex and cross-category, comprising non-alcoholic spirits and beers, premium cordials, sparkling waters and mixers in addition to canned carbonates, so its effect is hard to quantify and would be reflected in the overall market growth previously mentioned.

