

RUSTLERS: DELIVERING STRAIGHT-UP SATISFACTION

For Publication

Rustlers

DBA Design Effectiveness Awards entry, 2020



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 1999 Rustlers have become synonymous with flame-grilled super-fast food. They pioneered what is now known as the micro-snacking category and, within their first 20 years, grew the brand to £92m.

In 2019, as part of a workstream to plan the next phase of growth, the team identified significant further growth headroom and set a task to grow UK RSV to £120m by 2022. A few dials would need to be shifted to achieve that goal. Firstly, research showed that the brand had an opportunity to increase emotional engagement with its audience. They could also see that only a small proportion of the chilled convenience market were buying into Rustlers micro-snacking. And, finally, that there was an over-reliance on promotional SKUs. To grow, they needed the power of design to build a deeper emotional connection with consumers, help broaden their appeal to a wider audience, encourage cross-purchase across the range and increase the proportion of value over price led purchases.

This was no easy task. Whilst the overall convenience category (of which micro-snacking is a sub-category) was in growth, the competition for Rustlers was extensive and they were significantly outspending Rustlers when it came to marketing spend.

Attitudinally they were fighting deep-rooted cultural shifts which impacted perceptions of their brands such as increasing plant-based consumption, challenges in sentiment towards processed meat products and increasing health consciousness. The challenge for Rustlers was how to build around its strengths, whilst navigating these headwinds.

A new visual identity and packaging were needed that could generate a more emotive level of engagement at the same time as helping to frame Rustlers as a no-compromise product to enjoy. A new ranging system that would open up new innovation opportunities and be more intuitive to shop across the range was also required.

Our solution was to create a new, less literal brand identity, and a more attitudinal and engaging packaging design that helped the brand become more relevant to a wider audience, as well as opening the brand up to new innovation opportunities. The new simplified ranging architecture has helped the different products become easier to identify on shelf. Overall, we've succeeded in bringing the Rustlers brand to a wider audience against challenging competition and doing so in a category that actually declined during the coronavirus period. Straight-up satisfaction all round.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BUSINESS & MARKETING OBJECTIVES

- Drive penetration from 15.5% to 16.2% - bringing new shoppers into the brand.
- Increase value perceptions by growing base sales and reducing reliance on promo (to show consumers willing to spend more)
- We also wanted to see evidence of consumers buying across the range with an increase in volume & frequency per buyer.
- Create an innovation pipeline to enable the brand to grow across further occasions and reach new audiences.

RESULTS OVERVIEW

- Within the first six months following the design, the brand has seen a REDACTED increase in value sales and achieved a remarkable REDACTED volume. This has come even as the total chilled REDACTED and chilled ready meals REDACTED categories have declined in the wake of coronavirus with more consumers choosing to cook from scratch.
- Similarly, in the same period, Rustlers penetration has grown REDACTED while total chilled convenience has dropped REDACTED, and micro snacking REDACTED.
- The brand has also reached new audiences with a 23.7% increase in sales coming from middle families (5-9 years) and a 10% increase in pre-family sales.
- And existing Rustlers consumers are buying more with +15.1 % increase in volume. Again, chilled convenience has declined -1.9% in the period since the rebrand.
- Rustlers reduced the amounts of products they sold on promo by around REDACTED, currently selling REDACTED of their product on promo meaning that growth was coming from more people buying at full price.



BEFORE



AFTER

CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

For the past 20 years Rustlers have brought the ultimate tasty, flame-grilled burgers that can be microwaved and ready to eat in 90 seconds to the market. More than just convenience, Rustlers provide quality that consumers can trust. Their meat is fully traceable to the farm of origin and their products get checked at least 76 times before they leave the factory.

When Rustlers first approached us, they were already the UK's number 1 micro-snacking brand with an incredibly loyal customer base – with 3 packs sold every second in the UK. They had grown from 0 to £92m in their first 20 years. Now, their objective was to increase the UK RSV to £115-120m by 2022. A challenge that would require them to grow penetration, increase value perceptions and increase the amount consumers spent with them.

However in 2019, using Proquo (an online tracking tool) to continuously track brand

sentiment, Rustlers were beginning to fall significantly behind their key competitors - Ginsters & Pot Noodle by 5 pts. (2pts is a meaningful difference). At the same time, whilst Rustlers driver scores were staying relatively steady, competitor set driver scores were steadily growing. This clearly indicated that Rustlers needed to refresh the brand's positioning in order to continue to meet consumers expectations and keep up with their competitive set.

The Proquo insight also demonstrated that consumers didn't have a lot of emotive engagement with the brand. Looking at gaps within the competitor set, there was an opportunity for Rustlers to play on emotional drivers such as relevance, attraction and innovation to generate significant equity and create standout on shelf. By not tapping into these drivers, Rustlers were struggling to differentiate themselves from competitors, which was having a knock-on effect on their ability to move away from a reliance on promos.



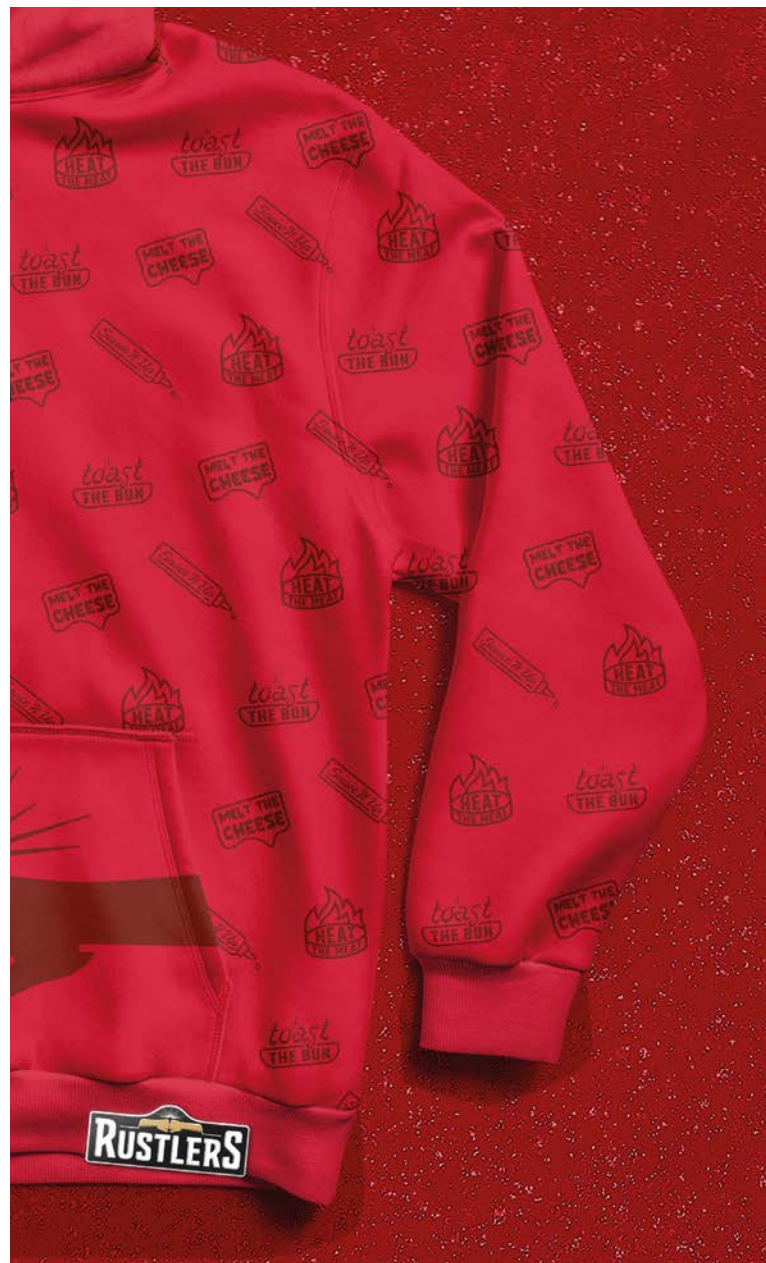
CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

Rustlers believed there was also an opportunity to target ‘the convenience seeker’, an audience of 4.9 million people who hadn’t bought into the micro-snacking category but were buying rivals such as Pot Noodle within the wider chilled convenience category. Rustlers had gathered consumer insight via The Big Picture Research (2018) on perceptions of the brand, which found that it was often described as ‘low quality, processed junk food (even by those who eat the brand)’. To drive perception and reach new audiences, their challenge was to combat these negative perceptions through bringing to life a new brand purpose, highlighting the quality of the products through provenance messaging.

Increased penetration for the brand was also going to be achieved by driving new innovation. Through research, Rustlers were aware of opportunities to stretch the brand into new categories & occasions. This was important for future proofing the brand, as it would strengthen Rustlers entrance into new spaces, expanding the brand’s permission to release true innovation.

With their existing audiences, Rustlers also believed that they had a significant opportunity to drive an increase in £ spent with them. This, they hoped, could be driven by better navigation across the portfolio.

Clearly, the packaging design could play a pivotal role in helping to achieve the key targets of penetration, value and spend per consumer on the way to driving overall growth.



CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

MARKET OVERVIEW

Whilst Rustlers are traditionally categorised under micro-snacking, they account for over 80% of that market. To judge their competitive space more accurately, it is helpful to look at the wider chilled convenience category. Prior to the redesign, the chilled convenience category was experiencing good growth. Convenience had been on the rise for a number of years and showed no intention of slowing down. According to data from IGD, the UK food-to-go sector is predicted to be worth £23.4 billion by 2024, with a growth rate double that of the total food and grocery market. International Food Information Council (2017) states that with 55% of millennials saying convenience is a top driver when buying food, we are beginning to see a rise in societal demand for products and services that both deliver quickly and make life easier.

On the other hand, the chilled convenience category is a highly competitive space and Rustlers had been outgunned by their competition in spend. In the 6 months leading up to the redesign, Rustlers two biggest competitors had spent a total of £4.2m on media in comparison to Rustlers which had spent only £970,000 in the previous year on all media. The growing demand for convenience foods has also driven mounting competition from food delivery companies such as Uber Eats, Just Eat and Deliveroo (according to HRC one-third of Western consumers are now using a meal delivery service, and 7% get a meal delivered once a week).

There were some further headwinds Rustlers had to contend with including changing attitudes towards health and food as well as the rise of plant based and a trend away from meat-based diets. Meals chosen for health have grown 4% in the past year and Rustlers, whilst made with 100% British and Irish Beef, because of their fast convenient food status are not typically considered healthy. Consumers are also increasingly choosing meat-alternatives, according to Mintel the proportion of Brits who have eaten meat substitutes has been rising steadily from 50% (2017) to 65% (2019). Furthermore, 39% of people were reducing their meat consumption



in 2019, up from 28% in 2017. Similarly, the acceleration in the number of meat free meals has grown considerably with 12% of consumers now following a meat free diet and a further 25% of people planning to reduce their meat consumption in the next twelve months.

With the growth targets the brand set for itself, within a rapidly changing consumer environment, the brand and packaging could play a pivotal role in driving equity; getting people to pay more for the product, helping it to appeal to a wider audience and to compete in a crowded market. Looking further forward, the packaging design needed to enable the development of new ranges to help drive even further penetration.

CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

SCOPE OF WORK:

- 21 x Core SKUs
- 10 x NPD SKUs
- Brand strategy
- Ranging strategy
- Design strategy
- Logo & wider visual identity

DESIGN CHALLENGES

- Bring more meaning into the Rustlers identity and move beyond functional associations to increase value perception, open the door for further innovation & increase penetration.
- Create better navigation across the portfolio to increase number of SKUs bought by consumers.



CASE STUDY OVERVIEW



SOLUTION

To meet the objectives of attracting new consumers, getting consumers to pay more for Rustlers and growing the innovation pipeline, we needed to move beyond residual codes of convenience (that focus on speed) and functional associations of flame-grilling. These associations, which were inherent in the previous identity, weren't providing consumers with a compelling emotive narrative that could drive equity with new and existing consumers and were forcing all new product innovations to adhere to the 'flame-grilled' narrative.

Being able to make quality food in just two minutes is a bit of a life hack. We wanted Rustlers to reframe convenience – from a last resort to no-compromise enjoyment – and to be proud to deliver straight-up satisfaction in seconds.

The new positioning for Rustlers celebrates its role as the 'Anytime Hero' – with a self-assured, no-nonsense and street-smart attitude. The visual identity is underpinned by a fist-bump icon that celebrates the straight-up satisfaction and 'nailed it' moments that Rustlers is all about.

This new icon generates associations that play to instinct and intuition, therefore generating a more emotive level of engagement (versus the pre-industrial flame-

grilling that came before, which simply evoked functional associations that didn't make sense across the full portfolio). The symbolism is universal in resonance and drives memorability and salience, as verified in The Big Picture Packaging Research "The fist bump reinforced brand identity and conveys a sense of connection and togetherness" and Sign Salad Research "The fist bump icon connotes informal gesture of respect, support or greeting... coding Rustlers as a brand that brings people together through everyday victories".

The fist-bump icon is complemented by a suite of distinctive brand assets, often used to deliver variant level personality, evoking both skate-culture and nostalgic Americana.

By shifting away from black as the only brand colour and introducing a new bold colour palette & ranging strategy, we've boosted impact at shelf, increased differentiation and opened up opportunity for Rustlers to position new & exciting innovations in a branded manner, to a broader audience.

KEY FACTS

LAUNCH DATE - APRIL 2020

DESIGN FEES - £226K

RESULTS

Rustlers performance since the redesign has been extremely strong. The coronavirus crisis caused a huge downturn in the wider chilled category as more people turned to scratch cooking and planned meals (For example, Bain research suggested 40% of people would be eating home-cooked meals more and 40% suggested they would eat ready-meals less). But on every metric, Rustlers was able to buck the category trend; driving penetration with new audiences, bringing value into the brand even with the reduction in promos and getting their consumers to spend more with them

OVERALL GROWTH:

Within the first six months following the design, the brand has seen a REDACTED increase in value sales and achieved a remarkable REDACTED volume. This has been all the more impressive considering that during the same period the total chilled convenience category declined REDACTED and chilled ready meals saw a decline of REDACTED in the wake of coronavirus with more consumers choosing to cook from scratch.

REACHING NEW AUDIENCES

New audiences have been reached with 23.7% increase in sales coming from middle families (5-9 years) and a 10% increase in pre-family sales.

Over the six months since rebrand volume per buyer has increased by 9.3 %.

Again, from a wider perspective we can see that Rustlers managed to buck the category trend. Rustlers penetration increased REDACTED while total chilled convenience declined REDACTED and micro snacking REDACTED. This was proof that Rustlers was reaching its competitors shoppers.

BUYING ACROSS THE RANGE

We could also see that Rustlers were showing +15.1 % increase in volume per buyer. Again, chilled convenience was declining at -1.9%. Micro-snacking grew +12.5% with Rustlers driving this. From this we can assume people were buying across the range. In fact, value per buyer is also up +15.1% ahead of category and micro-snacking.

PAYING MORE FOR RUSTLERS

Rustlers reduced the amounts of products they sold through promo by around REDACTED. Currently selling REDACTED of their product on promo meant that growth was coming from more people buying at full price. A really good indicator that the new packaging design was having an impact on value perceptions.

PERMISSION TO GROW INNOVATION PIPELINE

There are heavy plans for NPD in 2021 and beyond. The rebrand and new positioning has given the team permission to relook at the longer term 3-5Yr NPD funnel. They are exploring a broader range of channels, products, occasions and formats based on the stretch of appeal the rebrand has given them.



RESULTS

OTHER RESULT:

There has been a change in stakeholder attitudes and behaviours, where they have experienced a massive amount of buy in / excitement around the range.

“We are delighted with the outcome of the Rustlers rebrand process. After an extensive pitch process, the team selected Brand Opus as the partner driven by what we saw as leading-edge strategic thinking, exceptionally strong design credentials and critically a deep well of commercially successful case studies. Throughout the process we were highly impressed by the quality of the thinking, the clear evidence of that thinking in the design work and an absolute command of all aspects of managing the project – from engagement with printers, to working through research to stakeholder engagement. A real standout however was the level of collaboration which ultimately played a huge role in the

project's success. As a Private Family Owned business operating in an extremely dynamic and challenging environment, it is imperative that what we do works commercially & ultimately the genuine open and collaborative nature of this project ensured this was front and centre. We are really happy with the hard results but at a softer level, the thinking, design work and engagement through the project has built confidence amongst internal stakeholders, amongst our retail partners and also with external suppliers. The work also added significantly to our recent ATL Campaign (launched at the end of September 2020) which has been successful in building brand equity”.



RESULTS

OTHER INFLUENCING FACTORS

- The Rustlers brand released a brand campaign in late September. The results showcased in this entry are therefore taken from a period where there was no media spend at all.
- Summer is traditionally the more difficult trading time for Rustlers. The growth during this time is particularly encouraging as the pre-redesign data sample accounts for their traditionally stronger trading period.
- The effect of coronavirus on the chilled convenience category actually had quite a negative effect initially. Attitudes towards scratch cooking shifted significantly in the lockdown period (Bain research suggested 40% of people would be eating home-cooked meals more and 40% suggested they would eat ready-meals less) and this was born out in the growth of the ambient, fresh and frozen categories.
- As mentioned in the results, promo was actually down in the period compared to the 6 months prior.

DATA SOURCES

- **FOOD INFORMATION COUNCIL'S 2017 FOOD AND HEALTH SURVEY**
- **BIG PICTURE QUAL RESEARCH IN OCT 2018**
- **PROQUO, 2019**
- **SIGN SALAD RESEARCH, 2019**
- **KANTAR 24W/E 01-NOV-2020 VS 24W/E 22-MAR-2020**
- **BAIN RESEARCH, 2020**
- **IGD 2019**
- **HRC 2019**
- **MINTEL 2019**

