



'LITTLE, BUT MIGHTY'

FOR PUBLICATION

B&B

DBA DESIGN EFFECTIVENESS AWARD ENTRY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the story of how a radical rebrand transformed a small, seven-year-old, baby snacking business into Australia's leading, and fastest-growing, brand across all segments of baby food. Competing as one of a handful of home-grown baby food challengers against a market dominated by global food giants, Little Bellies has outgrown its peer group to become a dominating force in the Australian market.

Little Bellies is an Australian success story, and it now has global reach too. But crucially, this success has been powered by British branding expertise – across strategic positioning, creative communication and compelling brand design.

HERE ARE THE HEADLINES FOR LITTLE BELLIES' ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Increasing value sales by 262% over three years
- Exceeding ambitious growth targets by 162%
- Increasing market share by 169%
- Transforming consumer, retailer and supplier relationships
- Empowering global expansion

Before



After



CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

PROJECT BRIEF

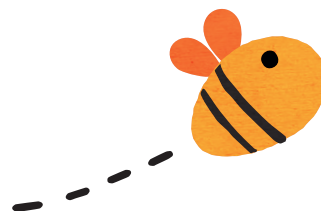
After seven years in the Australian market, Little Bellies had carved a niche for itself within the broader baby food category as the healthy snacking brand for babies. But with bigger brand competitors, as well as private label, nudging into the snacking space, the decision was taken to rebrand – and to reconsider the brand's role beyond baby snacks.

THE BUSINESS OBJECTIVES OF THE BRIEF WERE:

- Grow brand value by 100% over 3 years
- Extend existing snacking formats and enable the launch of wet food
- Enable extension into global markets

THE CREATIVE OBJECTIVES OF THE BRIEF WERE:

- Increase relevance and engagement with consumers
- Grow retailer belief in the brand
- Protect the brand from the threat of private label



SCOPE OF WORK

Upfront strategic thinking was an integral part of the project, and influenced every aspect of the rebrand. A single agency undertook the entire project, and the scope of work included brand positioning, brand architecture, creative strategy, visual identity, packaging design, messaging and communications, brand world and digital look and feel.

DESCRIPTION

Little Bellies is a family-owned challenger brand, launched in Australia in 2011 to create healthy snacking solutions for babies and toddlers, including puffed snacks and biscuits. The brand has always prided itself on its nutritional credentials – certified organic, with no added sugar, salt or artificial ingredients – and had won a limited, but loyal, consumer following thanks to the strength of its product.

With listings in both Coles and Woolworths, Australia's two major groceries, Little Bellies had created the baby snacking segment. But by 2017, competitors were entering the space, and the limitations of Little Bellies' branding was becoming more obvious. Product-led and generic, the existing designs lacked a strong brand presence, and while functional health claims were featured, there was no unique or compelling brand message to make sense of the facts or connect with consumers. The brand's founder believed in Little Bellies' ability to create better-for-you products across the baby food spectrum, beyond snacking and beyond Australia, but the current brand was limiting his ambitions. The decision was taken to rebrand.

It would be reductive to consider the rebrand as simply a 'design solution'. The agency undertook a strategic review of the category, consumer, competitor and cultural context to define a whole new positioning for the brand around the theme of 'Do What's Natural'. This message is designed to connect parents' intuitive desire to nurture with the brand's naturally made products, while helping to simplify communication around nutrition within the category, which had become unnecessarily complex and layered with parental guilt.

The work also included a new brand architecture, built around the ages & stages of the weaning journey to provide continuity and reassurance for parents. The Baby Bellies, Little Bellies and Mighty Bellies brands build on the theme of Natural Development to create an intuitive product offer, and have enabled the brand to branch out into new areas of product development within the relevant stages.

The design reflects the child's journey from baby to toddler to kid through a monster character who grows up across the stages. This unique, engaging and memorable character means that a recognisable design look and feel can be used across ranges while appealing equally to mothers of newborns (Baby Bellies) and to brand-aware kids who are 7 or 8 years old (Mighty Bellies). On-pack, the monster illustration makes sense of the Bellies brand name by positioning the logo on his stomach, while fresh product imagery and textured typography reinforce the natural feel.

Messaging is key in this category, and the new design features an ownable Little Bellies Pledge on every pack that confirms the brand's nutritional credentials. The Do What's Natural story is told across every communication, from pack to PR to social, ensuring parents understand the values at the heart of the brand.

Visually and verbally, the rebrand is revolutionary. By transforming Little Bellies from a product-led proposition to a philosophy-led phenomenon, the new branding meets the business's core growth objectives by engaging parents, enabling stronger trade relationships and initiating a platform for new product development.



OVERVIEW OF MARKET

For the purposes of this paper, market data is taken from the two major players of Australian grocery – Woolworths and Coles – who account for over 80% of the Australian baby food market. Within these stores, the baby food category grew by 34.6% between 2018 and 2021, however this figure was significantly impacted by the exceptional performance of Little Bellies. Indeed, if we remove the brand entirely from the equation, the category grew by just 22.4%. The category includes offerings from global food giants, such as Heinz and Nestle; global challengers, such as Organix, Ella's Kitchen and Kiddylicious; and a host of smaller, home-grown brands, such as Bellamy's Organic, Rafferty's Garden and Bubs Organic.

When Little Bellies originally launched in 2011, all these competitors were focused on wet food, with limited emphasis on snacking – a gap in the market that Little Bellies was able to exploit with its range of 8 healthy puffed snack SKUs. However, the subsequent entry of competitors, both branded and private label, into the snacking space was one of the key reasons behind the redesign. Little Bellies now competes in a much tougher environment, and has also branched out from snacking into the far more established, and crowded, wet food sector.

KEY FACTS

The Little Bellies redesign launched in September 2018. Design fees, excluding production, were **REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA**.



RESULTS

THE OBJECTIVE: GROW BRAND VALUE BY 100% OVER 3 YEARS

The Little Bellies rebrand achieved an immediate impact, with a 74.4% leap in unit sales in its first six months **REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA**. This success has been sustained over the subsequent three years, smashing growth targets and significantly outperforming the category.

BEATING SALES TARGETS

Little Bellies entered into the rebranding process looking to double the size of the brand – a value that had been steadily accumulated over the past seven years – in just three additional years. Yet by 2021, three years since the relaunch, the brand had grown by a whopping 262%, smashing that 100% target by 162% and speeding up the pace of growth exponentially.

Of course, the brand's sales have been boosted by the launch of new products – a key objective of the rebrand. But like-for-like sales of the original snacking range in market have grown at almost twice the speed of the category too – increasing by 65.6% over the three years (compared to category growth of 34.6% between 2018 and 2021).

Sales have steadily grown year on year following the redesign, starting with an immediate uplift of 60% in the first six months of launch, and only dipping during the lockdown periods of 2020. Indeed, without that unfortunate hit to on-the-go snacking and convenience food sectors in general, the brand's growth figures would potentially be even more impressive.

OUTPERFORMING THE CATEGORY

The brand has outperformed the category every year. In the first year since launch (2018-19) value sales increased by 47% compared to the market's 7%, and by 2021 the brand had grown by 262% **REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA** compared to the market's 34.6% (a figure itself hugely impacted by Little Bellies's performance).

With average sales per SKU growing by 44% **REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA**, it's clear that the redesign has delivered across the entire brand, transforming Little Bellies from a niche challenger to a serious player in the market.

DRIVING CATEGORY GROWTH

As stated, the category grew 34.6% over the past three years, inclusive of Little Bellies' exceptional performance. If we remove Little Bellies from the equation, category growth would have been 22.4%, suggesting that the brand contributed approximately a third of all category growth. The brand continues to see competitors follow where it leads, with numerous brands launching single serve snacking formats, including puffs, while competitor Rafferty's Garden has now launched a bowl product following Little Bellies' introduction of the format.



INCREASING DISTRIBUTION

Little Bellies is now ranged in every Woolworths and Coles store in Australia, with almost all SKUs listed in each location. In Woolworths, the Little Bellies SKU count increased from 14 to 39, while Coles grew from 13 to 26. The brand is also growing organically beyond the major retailers, gaining listings in independent premium retailers and health food stores across the country. This equates to over 3,000 additional distribution points since the relaunch.

WINNING MARKET SHARE

In the three years since launch, Little Bellies has increased its market share by a mammoth 169% **REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA**.

THE OBJECTIVE: EXTEND EXISTING SNACKING FORMATS AND ENABLE THE LAUNCH OF WET FOOD

NEW PRODUCT LAUNCHES

Little Bellies has increased its product range of eight SKUs in 2018 to 26 SKUs by 2021. While six of those new SKUs were introduced in 2018 as part of the rebranding exercise, the remainder have been enabled by the brand's continuing success. In particular, the impact of the new design has empowered the brand to enter into the competitive wet food segment of the category earlier than anticipated with a range of six baby bowls in 2020.

The decision taken during the rebranding process to introduce clear age stages has helped enable such launches, giving the brand permission to play in new categories and offering parents a logical feeding journey from pram to playground.

MAINTAINING A PREMIUM PRICE

With the average cost per unit in the category growing just 1.6% over three years to \$1.90, Little Bellies has grown its premium price average from \$2.00 to \$2.08 – growth of 3.8%. The launch of wet food baby bowls at \$2.25 in particular has demonstrated the strength of the brand in a category that had increasingly been on a race to the bottom, with prices averaging below \$1.50.



THE OBJECTIVE: ENABLE EXTENSION INTO GLOBAL MARKETS

GLOBAL EXPANSION

A major success of the rebrand has been Little Bellies' expansion into North America – a mature and highly competitive market. The brand's initial plan was to launch in approximately 500-1000 stores in North America – enough to achieve reasonable economies of scale and to prove the brand could be sustainable. However, by 2021 the brand could be found in 6000 stores, significantly exceeding expectations for distribution in less than two years. It is worth noting that no other Australian challenger brand has achieved any significant penetration within the North American marketplace, whereas Little Bellies has been able to build strong retailer relationships with the stalwarts of the industry, including Walmart, Kroger and Loblaws.

The strength of the design has been a critical factor in this success, with international retail buyers regularly commenting on its difference to what they currently have available on shelf, and its ability to communicate the brand offer quickly and clearly. In addition, an in-depth insights survey into the US market conducted by Mindsight has demonstrated this consumer understanding, reporting that at least 84% of parents of babies 6-11 months exposed to Little Bellies:

- Have strong confidence in the products' ability to deliver on noted benefits.
- Have outstanding purchase interest.
- Believe the concept clearly communicates a brand of products that is age and stage appropriate.

THE OBJECTIVE: INCREASE RELEVANCE AND ENGAGEMENT WITH CONSUMERS

WINNING CONSUMER TRUST

While Little Bellies has always been committed to health and nutrition, the rebrand has helped communicate this message far more clearly to consumers – through the overarching Do What's Natural positioning and messaging, and the Happy Belly Pledge used prominently on-pack.

While growing volume and value sales across the ranges represents the clearest evidence of this increased relevance with consumers, the brand commissioned research in the US market that suggests the message is being received loud and clear. According to Mindsight USA, 86% of consumers questioned believe that Little Bellies encourages their child to safely self-feed; and 84% of consumers believe it supports child development and inspires food exploration.



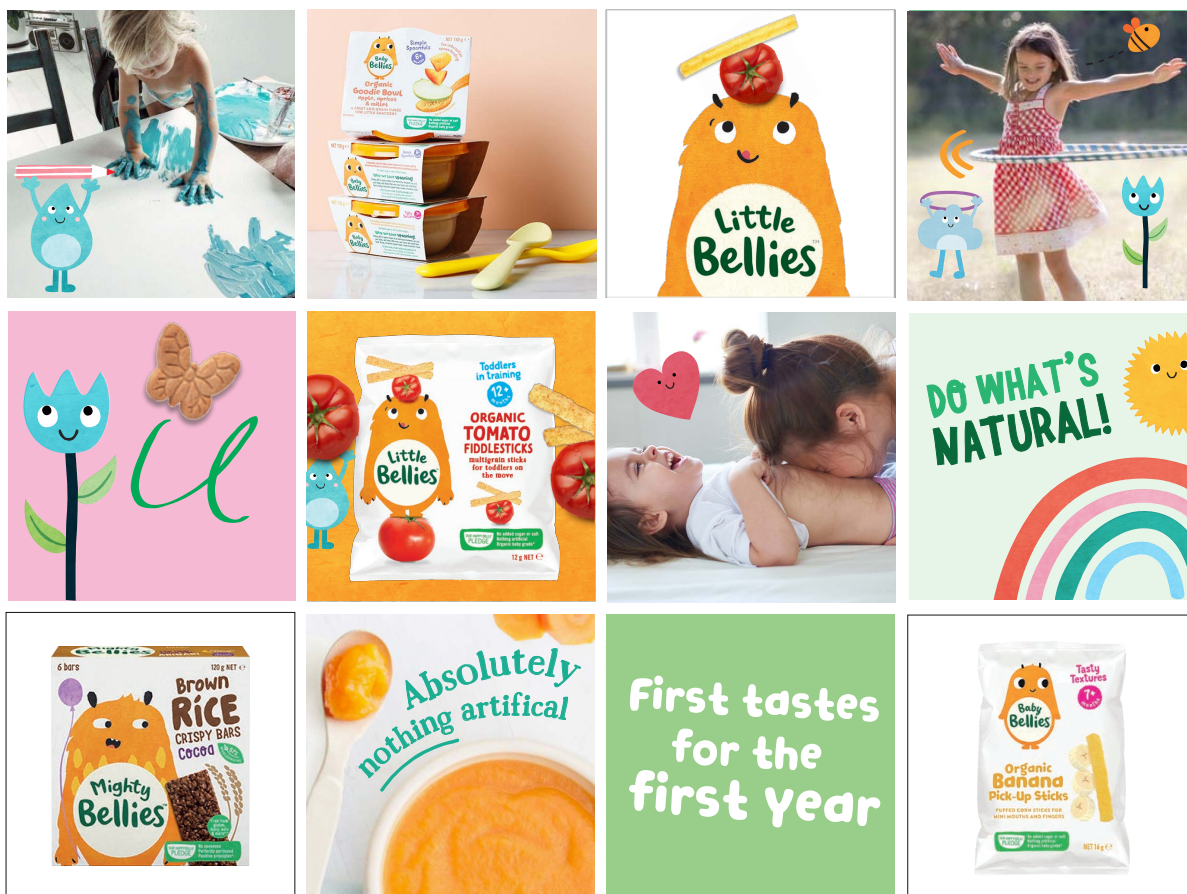
In Australia, positive reviews have flooded parenting sites, including Tell Me Baby, Product Review, Newborn Baby and Mouths of Mums. The launch of the baby bowls particularly has sparked great praise about how the messaging has helped simplify nutrition in parents' eyes and how the format has made feeding less stressful in comparison to pouches.

“It was pretty overwhelming when it came time to introduce solids to my little one’s meal time, but after using the bowls my fear of mealtime and introducing solids has totally gone.”
- Name Withheld, Tell Me Baby



BUILDING SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Despite having been in the market for seven years, Little Bellies restarted all its social media channels from scratch in 2018 on the back of the rebrand, due to its all-encompassing impact on positioning, message and design. The brand's social strategy concentrates on growing user engagement rather than building numbers, and Little Bellies now boasts a highly engaged and loyal social following – evidenced by the amount of user-generated content that the brand is able to attract and repost. The brand's most successful social campaign – Play with Food – was a direct interpretation of the rebrand's Do What's Natural positioning, and was created to communicate the beliefs and values crafted in the rebrand to a broader consumer audience.



THE OBJECTIVE: GROW RETAILER BELIEF IN THE BRAND

BUILDING CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

One of the most significant impacts of the rebrand has been the change in relationship between the brand and its retailers. Prior to the redesign, Little Bellies was categorised as a 'Bronze' brand by Woolworths on its supplier scorecard, but has since advanced to 'Platinum' – the highest rating available. Little Bellies scores ten out of ten in four key areas: for bringing new customers to the category; for its high retail sales value; for profitable cost of goods for Woolworths; and for return on store space.

The brand's performance since the rebrand has enabled a far more collaborative and productive relationship with buyers. Little Bellies is recognised as a 'Category Captain' for the Baby Snacking segment, and has been asked to provide input on the layout configuration of the space in-store. The brand also partners with buyers ahead of major review dates in order to bring new innovation to the market each year, and in 2020 received a direct email from Woolworths' Senior Director congratulating the team on its success.

THE OBJECTIVE: PROTECT THE BRAND FROM THE THREAT OF PRIVATE LABEL

THE ALDI EFFECT

The threat of private label competitors moving into the baby food space was one of the key reasons behind the rebrand, and creating an ownable look and feel that couldn't be copied was integral to the brief. Of course, neither brand nor agency bargained for the Aldi effect, where the success and ownability of the design makes it all the more likely to be copied! Following in the footsteps of some of the world's biggest brands, Little Bellies has had to do a double take in the aisles of Aldi, since the launch of Mamia Organic Baby Puffs. For a small and independently-owned challenger brand, this is an unexpected honour –and surely one of the clearest markers of branding success!

Little Bellies Brand



Aldi Own Brand



Image from www.aldi.com.au

BEYOND OBJECTIVES: THE UNEXPECTED SUCCESSES

GALVANISING INTERNAL TEAMS

Key to the rebrand was a strategic shift for Little Bellies to understand itself less as a product-led business with a narrow, functional purpose, and more as a philosophy-led brand, with unlimited potential. In addition to engaging consumers, the newly articulated beliefs and ideals of the brand have resonated internally, and connected every function of the Little Bellies business, from marketing to sales to finance, with a shared purpose and vision. This shift has set Little Bellies up for continued growth, employee loyalty and engagement.

ADDING VALUE THROUGH THE SUPPLY CHAIN

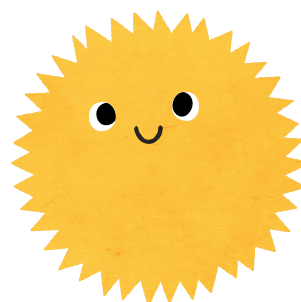
The values inherent in Little Bellies' product and its vision for NPD are also now much better understood by the brand's manufacturers, enabling a far smoother relationship. The new design has also created unexpected brand engagement further down the supply chain: Little Bellie's distribution company contacted the brand to suggest that its outer shipping cartons be branded so that the warehouse operatives could feel more closely connected to the brand.

EMPOWERING LOCAL AGENCIES

Although created in the UK, the new positioning and branding needed to be understood and executed upon by Little Bellies' local agencies to enable continued communications across PR, marketing and digital. In the three years since launch, local agencies have worked smoothly and effectively with the new brand vision, harnessing the strong messaging and visual assets developed for the rebrand.

“The way that the rebrand defined what the brand stands for and what its products deliver has completely empowered the business from the inside. We are not a single-message brand, and yet everyone now understands our stories and how to tell them. We are all suddenly speaking the same language.”

- Georgie Scott, Marketing Manager.



INCREASING SUSTAINABILITY

As stated, the rebrand has enabled the launch of Little Bellies' Baby Bowls into the wet food segment as a direct challenge to the unsustainable, but hugely popular, pouch format. These recyclable and reusable bowls have proved a huge hit with consumers looking to do the right thing as they navigate the complex parenting journey.

Redesigning the packaging has set in motion a sustainability journey for Little Bellies, which remains a work in progress. The brand has ensured all its soft plastic is approved by REDcycle, an organisation that assists with the recycling of soft plastics and films, as it is not currently possible to recycle films via home recycling. This has the potential to divert 22 tonnes of soft plastic waste from landfill.

BUILDING BRAND PARTNERSHIPS

Finally, the redesign has set in motion a series of lifestyle collaborations that would have otherwise been impossible. Most recently, Little Bellies has partnered with Kip & Co, a high-end children's fashion brand in Australia, to create a branded onesie for sale in Woolworths.

INFLUENCING FACTORS

MARKETING ACTIVITY

As an independent challenger brand, Little Bellies depends on the strength of its brand design and messaging across all marketing and communications activity. Indeed, the rebrand has empowered its PR and marketing agencies to deliver a strong and effective message across all communications.

The brand's marketing budget is based on a percentage of sales, **REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA**, which is relatively small for a brand-led business. This budget has therefore only grown in line with sales success rather than there having been an increased investment that contributed to sales success.

SOCIAL MEDIA / INFLUENCERS

While the brand has engaged in social media campaigns and influencer marketing, this is now par for the course across the category. New parents in particular are engaged users of social media as they search for advice and inspiration, and all the competitor baby food brands seek to target this audience. Again, all of Little Bellies's social content is born from the messaging and design created through the rebrand.

MARKET EVOLUTION

While the Australian baby food category has broadened from wet food into snacking, creating new opportunities for brand growth, it's worth noting that Little Bellies has swum against the tide here. While competitors have transitioned into the less crowded snacking category Little Bellies created, Little Bellies has entered the more crowded wet food space. Despite this more challenging trajectory, Little Bellies continues to outperform the category.

NPD & DISTRIBUTION

Launching new products and increasing distribution were key objectives of the rebrand. Of course, greater choice and availability can help boost sales, but it's worth noting that even the original redesigned SKUs outperformed the category by 65.6% as a like-for-like comparison.

SALES PROMOTIONS

Little Bellies operates on an 'everyday value' model, which doesn't rely on price reductions or promotions. Prices have increased incrementally and it's important to note that Little Bellies has achieved its sales growth despite maintaining a premium price point within the category.

COVID 19

As stated, the Australian lockdowns understandably coincided with dipped sales figures for the brand. While this hasn't affected the overall direction of growth within the context of the category, it has made for slightly lower overall figures than could have otherwise been achieved.

