Brand Licensing – what a load of bowls?

I have one thing to say – BOWLS!

Why do I say this? Well, it’s like this – as a bloke who has been known as ‘Mr. Kellogg’s’ for the majority of his working life, bowls have played a large part in my existence. While I was still very much incumbent in Trafford Park and spending large amounts of the real Mr. Kellogg’s money on promotional items, periodically it would be time for a ‘Bowl promotion’. Ceramic bowls, plastic bowls, melamine bowls, Footbowls, Tony Bowls, Wake Up collection bowls, Crunchy Nut bowls, Footbowls again ….

I loved bowl promotions – you’d be hard pushed to find a piece of merchandise that was more aligned with a brand than Kellogg’s cereal and a bowl to eat it out of (although a Coca Cola glass runs it pretty close).

Then I stopped being a promotions guy and start being a licensing guy and -guess what – I did some Kellogg bowls – but this time we asked people to put their hand in their pocket and buy them, instead of giving them away with a couple of packets. Why – I hear you cry – would anyone want to buy a bowl when they’d been given away for so long. I have to admit it’s a bit of dilemma, but of course, provided you differentiate what you are doing enough – either through quality or design - a bowl is still the item that will be most aligned with the Kellogg brand, and whether its being handed out or sold, it will always work.

At this point I hear at least half my readers saying ‘Really? You think? No S\*\*\* Sherlock!’ or words to that effect. But in a long-winded way this deals with a bit of a dilemma that is fairly unique to ‘lifestyle’ brands (particularly food brands) rather than entertainment brands. If there are obvious products that are associated with the attributes of a brand, it is likely that the brand will already have been out in the market using these promotionally, which can make it tricky to then take the same idea and do it at retail.

However, were there so many Coke glasses given away promotionally that no one needs to ever buy one? The answer is clearly ‘no’ as there is more than one licensee out there successfully selling Coke glasses.

What’s my point? Its simply this, that brands tend to have very singular attributes, and licensed products that support that attribute or brand characteristic are pretty much always likely to be the thing that are the best sellers. I’m not advocating that licensees shouldn’t be creative with brand assets – otherwise how would we have ever got a range of Anya Hindmarch Tony the Tiger handbags – however there is something to be said for looking at the core brand attributes, whether or not the brand has already used them for promotions, and driving a range of products off the back of these attributes to establish the brand presence.

From my own stable this means that the first Slush Puppie product we went after was, you guessed it, a scaled down Slush Puppie maker.

However to extend this further you can also look at the brand attributes as well as product function to drive this. Again from the Pink Key stable we have Pringles. There isn’t an obvious link to a piece of merchandise like a bowl or glass, but there is something uniquely Pringles in the shape of the can. Strangely it took Mr. Genius here a bit of time to realize that this is where we should be focusing. However, having had this ‘road to Damascus’ moment – we are now verging on obsessive about developing things that look like or could be shaped like a can – cushions, jigsaws, speakers, pencil cases…you name it. The phrase ‘Can you do it like a can?’ is seldom far from my conversation.

In a way this actually forces creativity – how do you take the most obvious thing about a brand and then translate it into licensed merchandise that adds enough value for a consumer to want to fork out rather than just say ‘I’ll have it for free’. Worth thinking about – in the meantime I’m back off to my dark room the think about more things you can do that look like a can.