

Business Stories

Fudge Kitchen

New branding and extended product shelf life enabled Fudge Kitchen to enter the wholesale market. Now the company is set to build on that brand, developing new products and increasing its wholesale offering.



Background

Enjoyed in the UK for over 27 years, Fudge Kitchen was originally an American brand producing and selling freshly-made, butter free fudge. The UK operation was bought out by Sian Holt in 1995 and now operates eight high street stores. Alongside the retail business Fudge Kitchen has also successfully entered the wholesale market and recently launched two additional projects.

The challenge

The Fudge Kitchen business model was totally based on retail theatre. Customers saw the product being made, engaged with the experience and literally bought into it. Whilst the business was successful it had limitations. The company wanted to increase sales and enter the wholesale market.

The unique fudge recipe produced a high quality product best eaten within seven days. The branding reflected Fudge Kitchen's USA roots and featured its founder, Jim Garrahy within its branding as 'Jim Garrahy's Fudge Kitchen'. To expand beyond the retail market required Fudge Kitchen to increase its product shelf life and reposition itself as an upmarket fudge producer, with branding and packaging to reflect the quality of its produce.

The response

Business Link was instrumental in putting Fudge Kitchen in touch with two programmes that together have put the company on a new path. Sian's Adviser at Business Link introduced her to a SEEDA funded pilot project called Business Plus. Working with a graduate student of the University of Greenwich, Fudge Kitchen set out to adapt its original recipe, whilst maintaining its additive-free ethos. The resultant research increased the shelf life to three weeks and dramatically opened up wholesale potential. Business Link's second introduction was to Designing Demand, a Solutions for Business programme developed by the Design Council, funded by SEEDA and delivered by South East Design. Initially seen as a pure rebranding exercise, the association developed to include renaming the business and is described by Sian as "a real catalyst for change."

Gavin Pryke, the Design Associate allocated to the company, worked with Sian to first crystallise the company's direction and develop the requirements of its new, up-market branding. The business was at a crucial stage in its expansion and the uniqueness of its product had to be communicated, to both individual customers and wholesale purchasers. With Gavin's help Sian chose Brighton-based Ape Creative to take the project forward.

Provided by

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the original brand. The secondary colour denotes the fabulous copper cauldrons used to cook the fudge.” When it came to applying the new identity we started with the new products and our new Oxford store,” said Sian. “The pure Fudge Kitchen branding was much stronger without the Jim Garrahy association and it was immediately obvious that we had made the right decision. Since then all our packaging, literature, photography, shop interiors and exteriors have been completely rebranded and our new website has just launched. We talk to Ape regularly and have just commissioned them to design a new exhibition stand to tour the consumer shows.”

The outcome

With the branding now in place wholesale turnover has gone from zero to £70,000 and is expected to double this year.

Fudge Kitchen is already supplying Dobbies Food Halls, Candy Cakes and Valvonna and Crolla, and is in negotiation with other exclusive outlets. The company is also benefitting from the trend towards buying local produce with the shops all producing for local wholesale supply.

The brand is growing. Fudge Kitchen has recently launched two new products, fudge sauces and a ‘make at home’ kit.

“When it came to starting out in the wholesale market our retail operation gave us a head start on many suppliers,” said Sian. We knew how to sell products and understood the market. With the help of Designing Demand we now have the identity we need to back our products up. My thinking has also changed from initial scepticism to being completely convinced of the value of design as a business investment.”

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“Ape have been a real delight to work with,” said Sian. “At the beginning of the process I think I shared the scepticism of many SMEs towards the design and marketing industry. Gavin not only provided a bridge into the creative world but was also there as support when some tough decisions were being taken.”

The hardest part of the process came when Ape presented the results of a customer survey. This clearly indicated that purchasers really did not care for, or understand, the Jim Garrahy connection. For Sian, moving away from such an established part of the branding was a critical moment. For the agency it provided an opportunity to start from scratch and create a truly innovative identity that is now in place throughout every aspect of the business.

“We really wanted the new identity to reflect the core of the business”, said Ape’s Russell Hales. “The distinctive swirl came from one of our first ideas, the mixing of molten fudge. We had already decided to retain the green colouring to maintain a link back to

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Contact

info@southeastdesign.co.uk

Visit

www.southeastdesign.co.uk

or phone

0845 337 446 4

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