

DEVELOPING A BRAND IN A COMMODITY MARKET

Overview

Since receiving a shopper insight report in 2009 as a supermarket supplier with ambitious plans for growth, Dingley Dell has grown from a small Suffolk food producer into an international supplier of exclusive pork products, to top end restaurants and food service companies. Major supermarkets are no longer one of their customers but the insight they received provided a catalyst for change and the business has grown from strength to strength, serving market segments much better suited for its exclusive range of outdoor reared pork sausages.

The Company

Brothers Mark and Paul Hayward own and run Dingley Dell Pork. Originally farming a mix of outdoor and traditionally bred pigs, the farm experienced a disease outbreak which wiped out all of their stock, providing the Hayward brothers with an opportunity to re-position their business. Sensing a growing consumer interest in welfare friendly food, they decided to rebuild their pig production business based exclusively on outdoor reared pigs.



Dingley Dell differentiates itself from the competition by focusing on taste, welfare and provenance and provides carcasses, primals, cuts and cured products from their own farm and their dedicated supply chain partners to up-market restaurants and hotels, high end retailers and several airlines in the UK and abroad, whilst continuing to supply retail butchers across East Anglia.



Insight

The writing was on the wall long before Mark and Paul received their first (and only) shopper insight report. Their lines were struggling within supermarkets and the data confirmed unsustainably low levels of penetration. To turn things around Mark and Paul would have had to invest heavily in promotion and advertising to raise awareness and encourage trial purchase, which they had neither the confidence nor the funds to do. Rather than invest their limited financial resources in supporting the price premium they needed to make their supermarket business profitable, they sought other market opportunities. This decision was made easier by the insight, which revealed that their premium sausages appealed almost exclusively to premium shoppers. These shoppers saw the value of outdoor reared pork and were willing to pay the premium, but too few of them were aware of the Dingley Dell brand. Mark and Paul decided that it would be more cost-effective to target this consumer segment through alternative distribution channels and turned their attention to food service.

At a time when many suppliers would be in a state of depression from their 'failure' with UK supermarkets, Mark and Paul were excited at the opportunities to be found in the food service sector and embarked on a new journey of discovery.

"We believed in our value proposition but struggled to convince supermarket shoppers to pay the premium we needed to make the business profitable. The insight we received confirmed what we feared but also restored our faith in targeting the top end of the market – it was a 'wake up' call that left a lasting impression on us and underpinned the need to align our USP with the right people in the right places". **Mark Haywood**

Action and Outcome

The realisation that UK supermarkets may not be the most suitable place for Dingley Dell to sell their products caused a major rethink of their business model. Mark and Paul decided to invest time and effort in the development of their relationship with a wholesale distributor who would open new routes to market and give them access to a different group of customers. Working with a wholesaler targeting the food service sector enabled them to develop relationships with many more people, including hotel and restaurant owners, and reach a number of new market segments through one channel, offering the potential for greater returns on their investment of time and effort.

Spurred on by their belief in the quality of their pork and the importance of taste and animal welfare, Mark and Paul undertook an extensive rebranding exercise, including new packaging for their retail products, a new website and a new Dingley Dell logo. The website (www.dingleydel.com) now tells a much more compelling story of what Dingley Dell is all about, highlighting their association with Freedom Foods to reinforce the animal welfare message and why their fresh pork products taste so good! The lessons learned from their invisibility within a supermarket environment have served them well.

Left: Before Rebranding, Right: After rebranding



Success

Eight years on since launching their new business model, Dingley Dell has grown significantly and now slaughter over 400 pigs per week (50% more than when they were focussed on the supermarket sector) to supply whole pig and individual



pork products for wholesale distribution across the UK, to top end restaurants (including groups owned by Gordon Ramsey and Jamie Oliver), private schools, football clubs and independent butchers. Internationally, Dingley Dell exports to top end restaurants across the globe within Asia, Africa and Europe. Their Suffolk bred pork is served on flights across Asia supplying Cathay Pacific, served within the Jumeriah Group in Dubai and within the Mandarin Oriental group as well as international sites of UK based restaurants. Reflecting on the successful re-positioning of Dingley Dell, Mark Hayward recognises the value of insight when a small business is looking for answers to questions that threaten their very existence,

“The insight we received was both damning and enlightening and came at a critical time for our business. We were struggling but could not understand why. What we learned was that simply having a fantastic product is not enough to guarantee success. Effective marketing is the key and to do that properly you need to know who to speak to. It became evident to us that the supermarket sector was not the right channel for us and our switch into food service has been a revelation. We now have an audience who want to listen to our story, understand what we have to offer and are willing to pay a premium for the exclusive quality we remain faithful to”. **Mark Hayward**

As the saying goes, ‘every cloud has a silver lining’. This case study will hopefully inspire those business who are struggling to survive in the supermarket sector to use insight to understand better the reasons for their ‘failure’ and discover opportunities in alternative markets.

Written by Lucy Coupe, January 2017.

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