

Nick, nack, paddiwack, give the dog a Jumbone®

Peter Lambert, Pedigree Masterfoods

The world of dogfood is not one that is usually associated with innovation, but in early 1998 a new product was launched which could justifiably claim that title. Its name was Pedigree® Jumbone®, and it was conceived, as are many of the best innovations, through a combination of a strong consumer insight and the creative use of technology.

About Big Dogs and Big Bones

Back in 1996, the marketing team at Thomas's Europe decided to probe two areas of dog ownership that appeared under-developed.

The first concerned large dogs and their owners. Our calculations suggested that large dogs should (due to their high calorie requirements) consume around half of all the manufactured snacks, treats and chews sold in Europe. In reality, however, they were being fed significantly less than this. Why? Were owners of large dogs less emotionally attached to their pets? Did the cost of feeding a large animal mean that treats were an unjustified luxury? Or, were existing products simply not meeting the needs of large dogs and their owners?

The second area of research focused on real "butcher's bones". Despite their apparent inconvenience and uncleanness, a high percentage of dog owners were still giving them to their pets on a regular basis. What was so special about a real bone? Why and when did owners provide them? Were there any negatives associated with real bones? Could we provide a better alternative?

Qualitative research with European dog owners improved our understanding of these areas, and helped us to develop some important consumer insights. We discovered that:

- large dog owners did tend to have a strong emotional bond with their animal;
- large dog owners also had the desire to give snacks, treats and chews;

- however, most manufactured products were seen as insufficient for a large dog, and often, therefore, inappropriate or poor value for money.

And, in our bone research we found that:

- real bone users regarded a butcher's bone as the ultimate dog treat, satisfying the basic instincts of their dog
- however, real bones had some major drawbacks including availability, hygiene and safety (with concern over BSE).

By combining the learnings from these two pieces of market research, we developed the Jumbone® concept: a large, realistic, edible bone for dogs. All the benefits of a real bone, without the negatives. Ideal for large dogs and their owners. We then had to work out how to deliver such a unique product!

When is a Real Bone not a Real Bone?

The product development brief for Jumbone® was challenging. It had to look like a real marrowbone, it had to be completely edible and clean to eat, it had to occupy a large dog for a considerable time, and it had to be highly palatable and digestible. And, of course, it had to meet cost targets to make it affordable (for the dog owner) and profitable (for Thomas's).

Product development took around 12 months of continuous R&D and engineering effort, and was achieved through the innovative use of extrusion and forming technology. Throughout the development, prototype products were regularly tested with dog owners to confirm that the product was meeting the brief.

In parallel, other elements of the marketing mix were developed. The name was created, checked and trademarked. Packaging and graphic designs were developed with external design agencies. A communication strategy was agreed in conjunction with the Pedigree®

An Innovation Case Study

advertising agency. A full pricing and profitability model was developed.

In mid-1997 quantitative market research studies were commissioned to refine the proposition. Results were outstanding, and a major capital investment was agreed for the manufacture of the product.

A "Tail" of Successful Innovation?

Jumbone® was launched initially at Crufts in March 1998 to an outstanding response from consumers. The product has subsequently been launched into 14 European markets and has now become the second-fastest selling product in the UK dog snacks, treats and chews category in value terms, ahead of many long-established products. This despite (or perhaps thanks to) the fact that the product is only suitable for large dogs. A Jumbone® has now been launched for small and medium-sized dogs.

Such success has only come as a result of significant investment of human and financial resources – over two years from conception to launch; significant commitment of marketing and R&D resources; extensive market research; major capital investment; advertising and promotional investment. A lot of hard work, a lot of belief, a lot of investment...all of which are necessary to create a successful innovation.

