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Top 10 UK OTC Marketing Stories 2020: Digital Health And Probiotics Lead The Way

by Tom Gallen

HBW Insight's countdown of the top-10 most read UK OTC marketing stories in 2020 includes launches and campaigns from consumer health players such as Sanofi, J&J, GSK and Bayer, amongst others.

In a year like no other, consumer health firms continued to launch innovative products backed by creative campaigns on to the UK OTC market. While COVID-19 forced a number of nationwide lockdowns and disrupted best-laid marketing plans, industry players demonstrated their ability to tap into emerging trends and meet consumers fast-changing needs.

Here we look at HBW Insight's top-10 most read UK marketing stories of 2020, which gives an insight into the launches, campaigns and trends which piqued the interests of our readership in an extraordinary 12 months. All would make great entries for our [OTC Marketing Awards 2021](#) which is now open for submissions until 19 March.

10

[*Stada UK Partners With Diabetes Charity To Promote Foot Health*](#)

Stada's tie-up with Diabetes UK to promote its Flexitol foot-care brand highlighted the importance of self-care for those suffering from chronic conditions.

The German firm's UK subsidiary Thornton & Ross explained its ongoing partnership with Diabetes UK would support patients to look after their foot health and prevent the development of serious foot problems, such as ulceration.

Diabetes sufferers were able to access resources – such as advice on identifying foot conditions – on the Flexitol website, where Thornton & Ross also made available its “three simple steps towards achieving better foot health and your own peace of mind.”

Alongside the Diabetes UK partnership, Thornton & Ross has utilised social media to create user-generated content to promote the benefits of Flexitol. “What we’ve found is that having consumers telling their own story about their use of the product has really helped other consumers connect with the brand,” CEO Roger Scarlett-Smith told HBW Insight. (Also see ["Stada UK Head On COVID-19 Impact, Local Growth Strategy And OTC Brand Innovation"](#) - HBW Insight, 28 Apr, 2020.)

9

[Pfizer's Upjohn Breaking The Silence Around ED With New Viagra Connect Campaign In UK](#)

Pfizer's Upjohn – which has now joined forces with Mylan to create Viatris – invested heavily in its OTC sildenafil brand Viagra Connect in 2020, spending £8m to raise awareness among both pharmacists and consumers.



As private-label competitors to Viagra Connect began to pop up, Upjohn focused on empowering pharmacy staff with new training materials and on highlighting via a nationwide television commercial the potential lifestyle factors that can contribute to erection problems. (Also see ["Perrigo To Launch UK Private-Label Viagra Connect Competitor"](#) - HBW Insight, 17 Feb, 2020.)

Alongside this, the company conducted a study of 5,000 adults which found a fifth of UK men experience erectile problems every time they try to be intimate with their partners.

Emphasizing the need to “break the silence” around the condition, the survey discovered only around 4% of men with erectile problems had sought help from a pharmacist, with 76% of men feeling too embarrassed to discuss the issue at a pharmacy.

Since the launch of Viatris the firm has continued to back Viagra Connect, recently entering into a partnership with Men's Health Forum and sexual health charity Brook to raise awareness of erection problems. (Also see ["Viatris' Upjohn Breaking Taboo Around Erectile Dysfunction With UK PR Campaign"](#) - HBW Insight, 4 Dec, 2020.)

8

['For When You Forget Your Jungle Formula' – Perrigo Launches UK Bite & Sting Range](#)

Perrigo sought to capitalize on the post-lockdown vacation rush by launching a Bite & Sting relief line extension to its Jungle Formula insect repellent range.

Combining aspalathus linearis leaf extract with the cooling effect of menthol, Jungle Formula Bite & Sting Roll-on provides instant relief from insect bites, jelly fish or after Nettle rash, according to Perrigo, while Jungle Formula Bite & Sting Relief Spray delivers direct relief from insect bites – including mosquitoes, midges and other biting insects – as well as insect and nettle stings.

“People often forget to buy an insect repellent as part of their holiday or staycation essentials list and can be left dealing with annoying bites and stings,” noted Perrigo UK & Ireland’s marketing director, Laure de Brauer.

“We’ve therefore introduced two innovative formats into the UK’s number one insect repellent brand, Jungle Formula, to help relieve the impact unexpected bites and stings can have,” de Brauer told HBW Insight.

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[P&G Tapping Into UK Vegan Trend Via Nature’s Best](#)

With more than half a million people in the UK now describing themselves as vegan, Procter & Gamble looked to tap into this growing trend in 2020.

Through its UK wellness subsidiary Nature’s Best, P&G launched two supplements aimed specifically at vegans: Vegan Vitamin D3 1000iu and Vegan Iron Complex Tablets.

Using a carefully selected strain of lichen, Nature’s Best claimed that the plant-based cholecalciferol in Vegan Vitamin D3 (1000iu) was the “most bioavailable” form of vitamin D. Meanwhile, the Vegan Iron Complex Tablets contained a bisglycinate form of iron – which was “gentler, meaning the tablets can be taken on an empty stomach” – as well as and the amino acid lysine to aid iron absorption and vitamin B12. The supplement would help address low iron intake which was a common problem on a plant-based diet, P&G said.

A 2019 study by Mintel highlighted the growing demand for vegan supplements in the UK. A survey of 2,000 UK consumers found that for 11% of vitamin, mineral and supplement (VMS) users, a vegan/vegetarian claim was an “important factor when choosing one vitamin or supplement over another.” (Also see "[Vegan Trend Propelling Growth of UK Dietary Supplements Market](#)" - HBW Insight, 21 Jan, 2019.)

6

[Infirst Launches GSL Version Of Flarin Lipid Ibuprofen In UK](#)

UK-based Infirst widened availability of its innovative lipid ibuprofen product Flarin in 2020 with the launch of a general-sales list version.



Having gained traction as a pharmacy-only medicine – with a unique point of difference from other ibuprofen products available in the UK – Flarin Joint & Muscular Pain Relief can now be accessed without needing to visit the pharmacy counter.

Alongside the launch, Infirst ran a new national TV campaign to support Flarin, which has a unique lipid delivery system meaning the drug is absorbed not in the stomach but in the small intestine and to an extent via the body’s lymphatic system.

This patented technology has been shown to help

- shield the stomach from damage associated with use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, the firm claims, and, in patients with inflammatory joint pain,

delivers a level of efficacy equivalent to ibuprofen doses double the strength.

Prior to the GSL launch of Flarin, Infirst managing director Andrew Macmillen talked to HBW Insight about taking on the heavyweights of consumer health in a “David vs Goliath situation.” (Also see "[David Vs Goliath – Flarin’s Macmillen On Slugging It Out With The Heavyweights](#)" - HBW Insight, 21 May, 2020.)

5

[‘Swipe Right’ For Rennie – Bayer Partners With Tinder For UK Marketing Campaign](#)

Bayer’s partnership with dating app Tinder for its Rennie brand is the first of a number of campaigns in our countdown which utilize digital innovation.

Using Tinder “branded profile cards,” Bayer said it was encouraging consumers users to “flirt” with their favorite foods via the dating app as part its “Falling Back in Love with Food” UK marketing drive for heartburn and indigestion brand Rennie.

Where Tinder users usually “swipe right” when they want to make a connection with a potential date, as part of this campaign, they can swipe right on a Rennie-branded card and receive promotional information and special offers related to Bayer’s heartburn products.



With the Rennie campaign, Bayer has created human personas – “Chip and Marg” – to represent Britons’ favorite foods: chocolate and pizza respectively.

The Tinder tie-up is part of Bayer’s “Falling Back in Love with Food” campaign for Rennie which it launched in March 2020 on social and digital media, out-of-home advertising and television.

4

[GSK Targets UK LGBTQ+ Community With Sensodyne And Voltarol](#)

- A push for diversity and inclusion in all walks of life was an important theme in 2020, one which GSK

tapped into with a series of brand marketing campaigns for oral-care brand Sensodyne and pain-relief range Voltarol specifically targeting the LGBTQ+ community.

A collaboration with UK magazine Gay Times, GSK said that it hoped the campaigns – which feature bespoke short films brokered by Publicis Media’s platformGSK – would increase the “positive diversity and representation of LGBTQ+ people, and other diverse audiences, in GSK’s consumer health advertising.”

The first film for Sensodyne – which ran exclusively across the Gay Times’ website and social channels – is called “Ice Cold Faces,” and shows a montage of vibrant individuals trying to enjoy a summer ice cream or cold cocktail until it touches their sensitive teeth.

The second film for Voltarol, called “Alternative Queer Hobbies,” ran throughout August and September on Gay Times’ channels, and features short social films, including individuals found with the help of community group Pride Sports, sharing their first-hand experiences of connecting through outdoor passions such as rowing, boxing and cycling.

Gay Times CEO Tag Warner said the publication was “delighted” to be partnering with GSK Consumer Healthcare for these campaigns targeted towards the LGBTQ+ community.

“It’s clear that platformGSK, Gay Times and GSK Consumer Healthcare have shared values in platforming diverse voices and advocating for better representation across marketing,” Warner said.

3

[Tapping The UK Probiotics Trend: Sanofi Launches Buscobiota, Two Nootropics From Protexin](#)

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, consumer demand for supplements exploded in 2020, with probiotics some of the most popular among UK consumers.

This article which looks at Sanofi's first foray into the UK probiotics market – alongside the launch of nootropics by Protexin – was unsurprisingly one of our most popular last year.

Buscobiota, a one-a-day capsule that combines five probiotic cultures – lactobacillus rhamnosus, rhamnosus R0011 and helveticus R0052, and bifidobacterium lactis B94 and bifidum HA-132 – is targeted at consumers looking to support their digestive health, according to Sanofi.

Sanofi said that Buscobiota could be taken as part of a “holistic approach to gut health, particularly for anyone looking for ongoing daily support.”

“The body requires nutrients to function properly and carry out vital roles,” said the firm, which also markets irritable bowel syndrome brand Buscopan and constipation relief range Dulcolax in the UK.

Since Buscobiota hit shelves, Sanofi has continued to expand its probiotics offering, launching DioraByota to sit alongside its Dioralyte line of post-diarrhoea fluid replacement products. (Also see "[Sanofi Expands UK Probiotics Presence With DioraByota](#)" - HBW Insight, 9 Oct, 2020.)

2

[*J&J Leverages Power Of Digital Personalization With Nicorette UK Extension*](#)

Johnson & Johnson's innovative combination of personalization and digital health to unlock smoking cessation success piqued the interest of numerous HBW Insight readers in 2020 and takes second place in our ranking.

Combining J&J's latest nicotine spray delivery system with trackable digital health app technology, Nicorette QuickMist SmartTrack leverages the power of personalization to help “provide motivation and encouragement to quit smoking for good,” according to the US-based consumer health giant.

J&J has described the product as “the world's first connected OTC medicine.”

[Click here to explore this interactive content online](#) ✨

Clinically proven to make quitting for good 2.5-times more likely versus willpower alone, says

J&J, Nicorette QuickMist SmartTrack was developed with behavioral scientists and co-created with smokers.

The product's behavioral support app uses near field communication (NFC) technology to create a personalized quit plan of "achievable milestones," providing a way of monitoring and visualizing progression, all which play a "crucial role in increasing your chances of success," according to the company.

"We understand that quitting smoking and nicotine reduction is one of the most challenging things a person can do and so we continue to work with the brightest minds to develop the next generation of products and robust support solutions to help smokers quit for good," Bill Twomey, senior director for J&J's global smoking cessation franchise, told HBW Insight.

1

[Sanofi Tapping AI To Help Consumers Manage IBS](#)

HBW Insight's number-one UK marketing article in 2020 is unsurprisingly focused on digital health and explored how Sanofi utilized artificial intelligence to help UK consumers to better manage their irritable bowel syndrome.

Through a partnership with digital health company Babylon, visitors to Sanofi Consumer Healthcare's Buscopan and Dulcolax brand websites were directed to try Babylon's AI-powered symptom checker for the "most appropriate health information and where to get treatment." Babylon's AI Health Service enables consumers input their health query and have a conversation with the AI Health Assistant, which provides them with triage and treatment advice.

According to Babylon, its AI Health Service mimics the way a doctor operates, performing some of the cognitive tasks they carry out, such as interpreting, reasoning, decision-making and learning. It helps the user to look at how their diet, health and mood combined affect their health and what they can do to improve it.

Sanofi said there was a clear unmet need to improve access to health information for those with IBS who didn't know where to turn to for advice. The company's own symptom checker – which is hosted on the Buscopan and Dulcolax brand websites – receives more than 100,000 visits per month.

Commenting on the tie-up with Babylon, Roberto Labella, Sanofi Consumer Healthcare's medical head for North Europe, said the firm wanted to support those consumers looking for reliable information around IBS and constipation with a "value-added tech service."

"The service from Babylon Health simplifies healthcare access and can be synced seamlessly to

our existing digital channels, making it a great fit,” Labella explained. “We believe it will really enable those with digestive health issues to get the speedy advice they need, when visiting a doctor or pharmacist is not possible.”