



# Longing for "nest warmth"

Seasonal business is becoming increasingly important for confectionery and the big brands. Dr. Uwe Lebok from K&A BrandResearch explains the psychological basics and derives strategies for limited-time marketing of confectionery.

By the end of summer at the latest, consumers in supermarkets, department stores and specialist retailers are once again getting in the mood for the upcoming Christmas season. Multisensually underpinned by visual Christmas bauble symbolism, the sound of bells and the scent of cinnamon and cloves, the high times for the confectionery industry begin again.

In fact, according to Nielsen, seasonal contexts have been the decisive sales and turnover drivers for the confectionery industry across all categories for several years. Next to Christmas, the leader, Halloween is slowly challenging Easter for second place: especially among younger consumers of Gen YZ, Halloween enjoys more topicality and thematic diversity than Easter. The importance of seasonal effects for our everyday life can be noted. The festivals implicitly and schematically regulate consumer behaviour.

In addition, the big branded companies are now increasingly using seasonal concepts to update their brands. Today, the traditional or neo-traditionalist "classics" are joined by numerous other "seasons". They make life easier for us through certain signal codes, key stimuli or behavioural patterns, such as the barbecue, garden and bathing seasons - unfortunately with little creative input from the confectionery industry so far.



*During the high season, chocolates and confectionery occupy the prominent places in retail.*

Basically, today there is a decidedly large amount of seasonal stimulation that influences us in a target group-specific or cross-sectoral way. If not only temporary effects are formative and not exclusively the "when?" question is answered, the experts of the market research company K&A Brand-Research speak of "contexts". In the broadest sense, these are "psycho-social perceptual spaces of repetitive events".

The easiest access to Context Thinking® is provided by so-called occasions of use, which can usually be described as temporary, local and causal. Contexts occur more or less frequently, but trigger certain states of mind, moods and expectations in us.

For decades, Christmas has nourished our expectations of harmony, coming together, cocooning or "cosy nest warmth". But the original tradition is becoming more and more distant from the consumer's field of vision in the generational view. Christmas has been stretched far beyond the Advent season, lives on anticipation(s) and various events, such as the many Christmas markets everywhere. Contextually, the season is strongly fuelled by the confectionery industry.



While supermarket shelves used to be comparatively manageable at Christmas time, with a friendly smiling chocolate Father Christmas figure in a standard red robe standing out iconographically, millennials have become accustomed to the seasonal overabundance of confectionery since childhood. The big confectionery manufacturers in particular have discovered the enormous sales-boosting effect of Christmas items for themselves.

In addition to the figures of the classic hollow manufacturers, Father Christmases, lambs, angels & Co. from Ferrero, Milka, Mars, Nestlé and others have long since been in circulation - in different variations and sizes. In such an environment, the chocolate Father Christmas becomes an arbitrary mass product and is only bought according to availability and spontaneous whim.

Seasonal biscuits are virtually "trapped" in Christmas mode

The picture appears even more arbitrary with Christmas biscuits, Printen, gingerbread, Spekulatius, the dominoes and Christstollen. They are an essential part of the Christmas atmosphere, but manufacturers and brands often do not play a decisive role with consumers. Moreover, these biscuits are virtually "caught" in Christmas mode: Spekulatius and Dresdner Stollen taste best mentally before Christmas. After Christmas, on the other hand, or even at Whitsun, "somehow not at all". Terms such as Father Christmas, cinnamon star or gingerbread alone are firmly linked to the Christmas season: breaking out would only be possible by breaking the mould several times and completely reinterpreting the products.

Even at Easter, a colourful hodgepodge prevails at the POS with an overabundance of Easter eggs and other promotional items. The Lindt golden bunny is still the proverbial "cock of the walk". Which product or brand ends up in the shopping basket is arbitrary, random or possibly price-driven in the abundance of known standards.

Halloween is more varied in terms of products and forms, with fruit gums and other sugar confectionery at the forefront. First brought to life in Germany a good 20 years ago, Halloween appears to be more open in terms of content and less traditional in its contextual design. This makes it interesting for Gen YZ. Halloween was an opportunity for new contexts and new product stagings. If one follows the controversial discussions about sugar as the "new sin", then it is already clear today that, sooner or later, new contexts will be needed to define occasions for the harmless consumption of sweets.



What disappears from everyday life, especially of the younger consumer generation, loses relevance and becomes a "forgotten category". Ultimately, this can also happen to the big categories if they no longer succeed in updating the product and its use. Even fruit gums today often seem too unspecific to younger consumers if they do not communicate new or rediscovered occasions. Or make it easier to decide why a certain fruit jelly is more suitable than others in certain situations.

Context Thinking® allows many manufacturers to think differently about the reasons for use. If, for example, "summer chocolates" are to be launched successfully, it is not enough to simply title a product with a seasonal indication. Rather, options must be developed from the consumers and the generic term "summer" as to how these new contexts can be made market-effective, either by means of quantitative CEP analysis (Category Entry Point) of existing contexts or via qualitative approaches that place the psychological understanding of the context at the centre (e.g. K&A Psychodrama® approach).

If you understand the (current or future) occasions of your consumers, you have all the control sticks for successful brand management in your hands. A look at other industries can certainly help to develop "new seasons" in confectionery as well. From our point of view, Storck is certainly a pioneer among confectionery companies with its contextual package designs.

But what Nimm 2 or Super Dickmann's have been doing for a few years can also be a possible way for many other brands to generate additional product use through occasions, contexts or new key stimuli through schema breaks. All that is needed is the courage to engage with consumers' contexts, to actually want to understand them and finally to courageously drive implementations in the market.

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