



THE BIG ASK

**HOW DO YOU
MAKE YOUR
BUSINESS
STAND OUT
FROM THE
CROWD?**

turn the page to find out...

What do sushi, shaving oil, puds and podcasts have in common? On the face of it, not much. But when they're promoted by the best business brains in their markets, it's one thing – an uncanny ability to stand out. DANIELLE WELTON sits up and takes note



This page: Will King used his own experience as a consumer to create a new brand. Opposite: Simon Woodroffe likes turning expectations on their head

IT'S A GIVEN that entrepreneurs compete against each other to offer the same or similar services, and that in a crowded marketplace it can be difficult to carve out a niche. That's what having a point of difference is all about. What the jargon lovers call a USP (Unique Sales Proposition) means that you create a reason for customers to choose you and your offering.

This is something that Simon Woodroffe, formidable *Dragons' Den* panellist and founder, owner and creative driving force behind YO! Sushi – not to mention spin-offs including the headline-making capsule hotel chain YOTEL – knows all about.

'We have lots of the same attributes as the groovy brands, such as Virgin and Innocent,' he says. 'We're fun, cheeky, bold – all of that. But the one thing that's different is that we're always innovative. So every time we launch something, people are like, "You've got to come and see this because they've turned it on its head!"'

For YO! Sushi, that 'big idea' involved making eating into an entertainment experience, complete with automated call buttons and sushi-making robots. The dragon believes that, 'As consumers, we're more sophisticated than ever before. People are inspired at a much deeper level. That's why YO! Sushi worked. People had never seen anything like it before.'

For Will King, founder of King of Shaves, stand-

ing out from the crowd was all about taking on billion-dollar brands such as Gillette and Wilkinson Sword with the launch of his own shaving oil. Starting from nothing in 1993, King has achieved the phenomenal feat of wresting a 20 per cent share of the UK shaving market away from the big boys. So how has he succeeded against huge corporations with collateral and clout that means they ought be able to beat him at every turn?

'When you play in a market where your competitors are worth tens of millions or, in Gillette's case, billions of pounds, you have to make sure the people buying your products are buying into something different,' says King.





'When I set up the business, it was because I hated shaving and hated shaving rashes. I could have created a can of shaving foam just like everyone else. But instead, I sold a tiny, 10ml bottle of shaving oil that I'd filled at the kitchen sink.

'When it first went on sale at Harrods, there was nothing else like it. It immediately engendered curiosity.'

As with YO! Sushi, King's product offered something out of the ordinary. But it's more than just his products that mark his company out as unique. Clever use of marketing media has, in itself, proved a major force for success.

'You have to look for every opportunity that's out there, and use it to differentiate your business,' he says. 'And you

have to engage – with clever, creative, cost-effective ways to highlight this through channels such as magazines, the web and YouTube.

'When we launched in the '90s, it coincided with the growth of lads' mags like *FHM* and *Loaded*. That gave me one channel right there. For the cost of a phone call and a shave that the grooming editor would hopefully enjoy, I'd get free coverage through reviews. And the reader would immediately perceive us to be in the same league as Gillette or Nivea. We were different in terms of the essence of our product and the amount of money we had to spend on advertising.'

A similar ability to harness new technologies and media is something that has propelled 24-year-old Karen Pearson into the business spotlight, earning her company, Karen P Productions, the accolade of being one of the *Observer Media's* Top 10 companies to watch out for in 2008.

Pearson launched her company only last year – to satisfy a growing demand for tailored audio content – and now produces radio adverts and podcasts for the major likes of the BBC, Channel 4 and Red Bull. An ability to pre-empt changes in technology and consumer trends have helped Pearson identify a growing market. But how has

'YOU HAVE TO LOOK FOR EVERY OPPORTUNITY AND USE IT TO DIFFERENTIATE'

she managed to stand out from all the other bright young things hoping to do the same?

'We've never physically gone out to get business, so the quality of our content, our experience and reputation is everything – and word of mouth is key,' she says. 'But that's not all. We offer something different by providing a one-stop shop – not only producing content, but also helping to develop and market it. Many companies want audio content but have no one in-house to do it, so they come to me knowing they'll get high-quality content plus help developing it – the whole package.'

It's this combination of technical know-how, marketing savvy and sheer conviction in the quality of her product that makes Pearson and her business stand out.

Another who was always convinced he had a product that was head and shoulders above the rest is James Averdieck, founder of chocolate pudding company Gü. If he was confident that the taste of his indulgent dessert range would mark it out, his big challenge was for it to physically stand out on the supermarket shelves.

'I knew I had a great product. But I needed branding that would do it justice,' Averdieck says. 'I took it to a brand guy, and two weeks later he showed me a competitor brand – or so I thought. My heart sank, this was exactly what I wanted to do, right down to the name.'

Luckily, he was looking at a mock-up of his future branding. Next, Averdieck conducted some swift market research by placing empty boxes displaying the new Gü brand on the shelves of a local supermarket, and stepping back to see what happened.

'Within 15 minutes, someone had picked up a box and put it into their shopping basket,' he says. 'We had to own up and tell them it was an empty box.'



With Gü now boasting a turnover of £20 million, this all turned out to have been a very worthwhile branding exercise.

Not that mere branding is enough. Gü's great puddings win rave reviews for their taste, YO! Sushi serves food that keeps diners coming back, Karen Pearson's podcasts are instantly popular and Will King's shaving products do their job smoothly.

As King concludes: 'There's no point differentiating mediocrity. Product is king, and if you don't you have a great product or service to begin with, it will still end up getting ignored.'

This page: James Averdieck knew his products needed to score more than just taste good. Opposite: Karen Pearson aims to offer an overall package that her competitors can't match

AGAINST THE ODDS

Britain's Shelley Rudman won a silver medal in the women's Olympic skeleton in 2006 – a feat which involved hurtling headfirst down an ice track on a small sled with no brakes at speeds of up to 80mph. Rudman had no funding, it was her first full season on the top-level circuit and the UK doesn't even have a full bobsleigh track. The 26-year-old tells us how sheer determination helps her stand out against the odds



Because we don't have our own skeleton track in Britain, we have to train on tracks all over the world for five months of the year. We've pretty much got it against us, but I

don't like to be defeated and I seem to thrive when things are against me.

I've had lots of knock backs along the way, and always try to learn from them. I think they've helped me grow into a better athlete.

I set myself very high standards. And even in Turin, where I came away with Silver, I still didn't feel like my sprinting and push starts were up to speed. I still felt I could improve maybe 50 per cent, which is quite a leap. If you look at Maya Pedersen – who won the gold and has been competing for 12 years – and the way she drives, you just think, wow, there's another step I can take.

Because the skeleton is a very technical sport and the difference between winning and losing can come within a hundredth of a second – I've actually won



a race by one hundredth of a second before – I still feel there's tons I can improve on. I'm working on my starts at the moment.

I'd really like to challenge the best in the world and to come out of the sport as one of the top athletes.