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So says the 12-man judging panel for Consumer Superbrands 2003, launched today (Thursday) by The Brand Council and previewed exclusively by Marketing. The book explores the history, development and achievements of many of the strongest brands in Britain, examining how they have made it to the top and how they have managed to stay there.

Many of the 74 brands that are featured in the book are stalwarts of its pages, proving that they can evolve to withstand consumer flux, market downturns and bitter competition to retain their positions. But 22 are new entrants, having come to the attention of the judges by pushing their way to the top of their sector on the strength of sales, innovative thinking and ground-breaking marketing.

Here, we examine three brands that continue to grace the pages of Consumer Superbrands - M&S and Persil have featured since 1995 and Virgin since 2001 - and three new entrants.

MARKS & SPENCER: SUPERBRAND SINCE 1995

Marks & Spencer has fought back from a difficult period to regain a hold on the high street. In November 2002, it posted a 7.9% jump in overall sales and a 41.1% rise in operating profit. Chairman Luc Vandevelde said it had 'moved from securing to sustaining the recovery'.

M&S began to falter at the end of the 90s, when for the first time it felt the pressure of intensifying competition.
Vandeleverde's recovery strategy operated on a number of fronts. At a corporate level, the company disposed of its loss-making operations.

A restructured balance sheet enabled it to return pounds 2bn to shareholders, while laying the groundwork for future growth.

M&S also turned to George Davies, the man behind Next, to tempt younger customers with his Per Una range. Yasmin Yusuf was brought in from Warehouse as head of clothing design.

Another key aspect was the 'Perfect' campaign, which promoted the chain's high-quality, everyday wardrobe staples while stressing their affordability.

In line with the activity, the company worked on improving the fit of its clothing, based on a survey of 2500 female customers.

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Its place in the country’s cupboards has been maintained by continuous innovation throughout its 94-year history.

Persil was the first brand to bring tablets onto the market and now leads the sector. Persil Capsules, which was actually third to market, now leads the capsules sector, with sales worth more than £28.1m in its first eight months. After its first year, one in five people in the UK had bought Persil Capsules, with the product outselling its nearest competitor by two to one.

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Today, Persil focuses on creating relationships with its consumers. In September 2002, the brand unveiled the world’s biggest picture mosaic—the culmination of a three-month-long drawing programme in schools and playgroups—to mark the start of its ‘Get Creative’ initiative.

More than half of all primary schools have registered to the scheme, which lets parents help their child’s school get a share of at least £7m worth of free art and craft classroom kits by collecting ‘Persil Stars’.

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The current market for eyecare products and services is estimated at more than pounds 2bn, with just under half provided by small independent opticians.

Specsavers was the first optician to advertise its products and services on television and still spends more on TV than any competitor - more than pounds 14.5m in 2002 (ACNielsen Media Research). Specsavers' campaigns, produced by an in-house creative team, regularly appear in Marketing's Adwatch.

Its in-store magazine, View, which is published in-house twice a year, is available free in all stores and is mailed to 600,000 customers.

The company also sends out more than 220,000 letters a week reminding people that they are due for a sight test or that their contact lenses are ready for collection, and informing them of current and forthcoming offers.

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First registered in 1866, the distillery continues to craft old-time Tennessee whiskey the way Mr Jack did 140 years ago and remains true to its founder's straightforward motto: 'Each day we make it, we will make it the best we can'.

Jack Daniel's Old No. 7 Tennessee sour mash whiskey, owned by US company Brown-Forman, is the leading imported whiskey brand in the UK, both in terms of volume and value.

Between 1997 and 2001, consumption of blended whiskies fell by 7%, from 35% to 28% of adults, while consumption of premium malts fell by 3%, from 21% to 18% of adults, according to BMRB and Mintel.

Consumption of imported whiskies such as Jack Daniel's, meanwhile, has remained constant at 11% over the past four years.

Recent buoyant sales of imported whiskies have been largely spurred
by the success of brands such as Jack Daniel's and its appeal to younger drinkers. The typical Jack Daniel's drinker is a man in his mid-20s, and the brand targets 18- to 24-year-old male students and young workers. This highly social group expects a lot from life and has a 'live for today' attitude.

The brand is also redoubling its efforts to retain 25- to 44-year-olds.

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Muller, the third-biggest grocery brand in the UK, currently holds a 40% share of the yoghurt market. Since its introduction to the UK in 1987, Muller has built retail sales in excess of pounds 300m, with 17 different product lines and 65 product variants.

In one record day in 2001, the brand sold 4.7 million pots of yoghurt - exactly equal to its first full-year sales 14 years ago. In the same year, Muller invested pounds 55m in a state-of-the-art extension to its Market Drayton factory in Shropshire to double production capacity to more than two billion pots a year.

In keeping with the brand's philosophy of innovation, Muller launched a number of products in 2002. The most recent was Muller Corner Squeezers, the twin-tube format containing Muller Corner yoghurt and fruit sauce, in September 2002. It is aimed at children and teenagers.
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Publication: Marketing

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Publication: Marketing; Copyright of Marketing. Source: Financial Times Information Limited - Europe Intelligence Wire.
Inadin is Crowned A Superbrand

RANK: Anadin

TARGET MARKET: Retailers & Consumers

UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION (USP): Leading analgesic Anadin has entered the pantheon of the superbrand by featuring in the annual brand bible, Consumer Superbrands. The reasons Anadin has been selected are clear. From its introduction into the UK in 1932, Anadin has developed into the most famous OTC brand in the UK - with over 90% consumer awareness, huge market appeal and a product range worth £45 million.

AVAILABILITY: Now

SUPPLIER: Wyeth Consumer Healthcare

CONTACT: Lexis PR

TEL
Brand Council adds high-street multiple and optical supermarket to top brands list

Official: Specsavers is a retail ‘superbrand’

Specsavers Opticians has been officially named as one of Britain’s new ‘superbrands’.

The accolade has come from the Brand Council which has picked the nationwide group from the UK’s thousands of commercial brands for its Consumer Superbrands 2003.

The multiple, which has joined the list for the first time along with Asda, is applauded by the Brand Council as having a market share ‘twice that of its nearest high street competitors’.

‘With approaching 500 stores in the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands, Specsavers is one of the most successful brands in retail optics and is the fifth largest opticians in the world.’

A total of 22 new entrants joined the superbrands list for 2003, which has 74 brands in all.

Specsavers: market share ‘twice that of its nearest competitors’

Advertising industry magazine Marketing (March 20) has defined a ‘superbrand’ as ‘capable of organic growth and evolution’. Also super-brands ‘do not cut [advertising] spend when the economy wobbles, but invests continuously’.

The publication said the multiple had revolutionised the optical market and was the ‘first optician to advertise its products and services on television and still spends more on TV than any other competitor’.

In addition to Asda, retail giant Tesco, the rival supermarket group in the profession, continues to figure on the list.
Should Ryanair refocus for emotional appeal?

Ryanair's profits are riding high in spite of negative PR. But does its policy of putting price before service undermine its brand? Daniel Rogers asks the experts for their views.

Ryanair is a marketing phenomenon. Its bosses have burned the textbooks on superior customer experience and unashamedly followed a 'pile 'em high, sell 'em cheap' pricing strategy.

And yet at a time when many of the world's airlines teeter on the brink of bankruptcy, Ryanair is turning in powerhouse financial results. It is Europe's most profitable airline, with a market capitalisation well above that of British Airways.

But what is the true health of its brand? The Which Airline? report by the Consumers' Association places Ryanair at the foot of a league table of low-cost airlines, with only one-third of customers keen to recommend it to a friend.

While its expansion continues, recent passenger and internet statistics suggest Ryanair's load factor (how full its planes are) in February 2003 was down 1% on a year ago to 81%, while main rival easyJet was up to 88.7%.

Ryanair has seen a barrage of negative publicity, beginning last spring with unsubstantiated rumours that pilots were cutting corners and continuing with BA briefing media against its lack of customer back-up. Criticisms hit a peak with its purchase of Buzz (Marketing, February 6). Ryanair soon slashed 440 jobs and scrapped several routes.

In the face of customer complaints, Ryanair boss Michael O'Leary's standard response is, "Well, what do you expect for £20 return?" Indeed, the flipside of the Which? survey is that the carrier scores well in terms of value for money.

So does it matter whether people don't love Ryanair, as long as they value it? Possibly. This week, Superbrands research named BA as one of the three brands consumers would miss most. While Ryanair continues to grow, it may need to worry just a little about such values, but will there be a time when it yearns for them?

We quizzed Tim Jeans, managing director of MyTravel Life and former top marketer at Ryanair, and Simon Matthew of communications strategists Rise, which is launching Now airline this summer.
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