



## CONVENIENCE TODAY CONVENIENCE TOMORROW

HOW SUPPLIERS CAN INVEST IN THE FUTURE OF THEIR  
BRANDS IN INDEPENDENT RETAIL AND WHOLESALE



# Convenience Today: Convenience Tomorrow



**“It was so refreshing to hear an industry panel with people just saying what they really felt.”**

**That was one of the pieces of feedback I received from an audience member after the ‘Convenience Today: Convenience Tomorrow’ summit drew to a close.**

It was a privilege chairing one of the day’s two panel sessions though it felt like herding cats at times. But the feedback meant that we had done our job. What promised to be a ‘no-holds-barred’, Question Time style panel event had lived up to its promise. Both sessions had been given a loose framework to work within, but were encouraged to go on whatever tangents suited both audience questions and whatever the panellists wanted to say.

For certain companies, what was discussed would be difficult to stomach. A major confectionery brand, tobacco company, national wholesaler and basically every supplier rep, were made targets during the debates.

However, beyond the criticism, there were some excellent learnings for suppliers to grow their businesses within this vibrant channel.

In the same vein that Newtrade Media provides actionable advice for retailers in RN, Retail Express and Better Wholesaling, here, in partnership with leading consumer brand PR consultancy, Cirkle, and major data and digital specialists, TWC, we’ve done something similar for suppliers.

This report condenses the highlights from the day into bite-sized lessons across seven of the most pressing topics for the industry. We believe this report will ...

- Help suppliers to engage with the sector more effectively
- Provide suppliers with more understanding about where the trade is investing
- Give suppliers valuable tips and talking points to discuss with their customers

I sincerely hope you find this report useful and, in the spirit of ‘no-holds-barred’, I’d be delighted to hear any feedback - good or bad. You’ll find our contact details at the back.

**Chris Dillon**  
Editor  
Newtrade Media



# Panellists



**Steve Bassett, Owner  
FIVE LONDIS STORES**

Overall Best Shop 2017, co-founder of Brown Box for packaged food and non-food products [Overall Best Shop](#)

**Clare Bocking, Chief Commercial Officer  
DCS GROUP**

UK's largest distributor of global health, beauty, household and own-label brands and products

**Steve Fox, Managing Director  
MOTOR FUEL GROUP**

The the UK's largest independent forecourt operator, over 30 years' experience in food and convenience retailing

**Kevin Hunt, Managing Director  
LAWRENCE HUNT & CO**

Chain of 26 SPAR stores in and around Lancashire

**Jonathan James, Owner  
JAMES RETAIL LTD**

One of the UK's largest independent retail operators, founding chairman of the Budgens National Retailer Council, Board member of the ACS

**John Kinney, Sales & Marketing Director  
UNITAS**

Largest wholesale services company in the UK with a buying power of £8.5bn, 172 wholesale members

**Mital Morar, Owner  
INDEPENDENT RETAILER, MANCHESTER**

Retail innovator, partnering with street food vendors and niche artisan brands for exceptional store experiences

**Debbie Robinson, Chief Executive  
CENTRAL ENGLAND CO-OPERATIVE**

Oversees 400 stores across 16 counties, chair of the ACS

**Amrit Singh, Owner  
NISA LOCAL HIGH HEATH**

Independent Achievers Academy: Overall Best Shop [Overall Best Shop](#)

**Neil Turton, Managing Director  
SUGRO**

The UK's leading confectionery & impulse wholesale buying group, former chair of the Association of Convenience Stores and ex CEO, Nisa

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A plastic bottle is shown floating in blue water. In the background, there is a large, semi-transparent '01' graphic. The word 'SUSTAINABILITY' is written in large, bold, white capital letters across the middle of the image. The letters are framed by white lines: a vertical line on the left, a horizontal line below, and a bracket-like shape on the right.

# SUSTAINABILITY

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MEDIA

ciracle

twc

# Sustainability is my biggest opportunity

**There are no prizes for guessing that 'sustainability' was one of the first words mentioned by the panellists. Every retailer and wholesaler on stage admitted it was high on their agenda and ranked it among their biggest priorities for 2020 and beyond.**

## **Wholesalers recognise changing consumers**

The first thing younger shoppers want to know is if a product is recyclable because it is high on the agenda at schools. We're going to have a much more educated, young customer base whose demands will change what we offer. **John Kinney**

## **Veganism is a slow burner for convenience**

Everybody wants to eat healthier now and the trends we're seeing towards veganism and free-from are linked back to health; we have to offer those types of products. **Steve Fox**

## **The less plastic the better**

Sustainability is the biggest opportunity for independent retailers. We've introduced refill stations for things like rice and nuts, sustainable carrier bags and less packaging. The big opportunity for us is household refill because it doesn't go off. **Mital Morar**

## **Saving money is fashionable**

I partnered with the food waste app - Too Good To Go - and am doing a refit looking at eco-friendly chillers, heat recovery and carbon counters. It's fashionable now to shout about how much you've saved. It brings in new customers. **Amrit Singh**

## **Cautious calls for legislation**

I almost want the government to legislate for sustainable packaging so that volume grows and the price comes down. **Steve Bassett**

## **New opportunities**

One of our wholesalers has a profitable internet business - like a dark supermarket, it takes products from manufacturers that are nearing their best before dates or things like products in Christmas packaging and selling them online - approvedfood.co.uk. **Neil Turton**



**DATA**

02

# Data is critical if we are going to be as good as we need to be

**Getting the convenience sector to understand and utilise the data that it has is one of the most important missions for business owners over the next five years.**

## **Suppliers need to get better at feeding back**

It can be a challenge getting suppliers and wholesalers to feed back on the data they have, so we gathered data across our five stores and ran a report across them where I could see which ones were stocking certain lines. Our tills are full of data, but it feels like no one can do anything. **Steve Bassett**

## **Data can grow sales**

Data not only helps grow sales, it also helps reduce wastage and mark-downs. It grows profits and profitability. Wholesalers and retailers could work together with trade associations and the sector could be as good as Amazon. But wholesalers sit on it and say 'we won't give you data as you may nick it'. It's insane. **Scott Annan (Delegate)**

## **Data must be seen as authentic**

The industry is way behind with its use of data and consumers have moved on. We should be using data to tell us what the consumer wants, when they want it, how they want it. **Amrit Singh**

## **Data is treated as a defensive asset**

The UK has some of the best convenience stores in the world, and yet we have some of the worst applications of data. It's difficult to get wholesalers to open up: E-commerce in wholesale will change this. **Neil Turton**

## **Collaboration is essential**

In our industry, data is really important but also really under-used. We're working with a major buying group (Unitas), utilising their data to ensure the bestselling SKUs are in the best distribution. We've done great trials, putting the right stock in and seen up to +17% sales increase. **Clare Bocking**

**We have tills full of data but it's not being used. There isn't a single group that's getting hold of our data and telling us 'you're not doing this to grow your sales'.**

Jonathan James



# TECHNOLOGY

# Technology is the key to higher margins

**Evolving with new technology is crucial for all independent retailers and wholesalers, but the trade is wary of investing for the sake of it.**

## **An uncertain future for cash**

I can't see cash having a future. Younger generations are now cashless so being able to be relevant is our big opportunity.

**Debbie Robinson**

5G will give consumers more instant access to more information - be that home shopping or deliveries - and retailers can join that bandwagon. **John Kinney**

## **Uncertainty for self-service checkouts**

While technology opens doors for many independents, it must be relevant to shoppers' expectations. We've seen some of our competitors changing almost all of their checkouts to self-service and we've picked sales up as a result. Some of our older customers don't want to be forced, so there's a niche there for personal service. **Kevin Hunt**

## **Technology is breathing life back into declining sectors**

We're trialling an app - Paper Round - the deliverers all appear on the phone and it enables us to monitor the deliveries and bill customers. **Jonathan James**



# EXPERIENCES

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# It's not just about the shop, it's about the experience

**The days of just using a convenience store or wholesaler to serve a purpose are over. Now the focus is on how to make every shopping experience a memorable experience – for the right reasons.**

## **Focusing on what the internet can't do**

It's all about immediate consumption. Quality foodservice will be crucial. Technology will have a place, especially with things like pre-ordering, which will help us get everything ready for when a consumer arrives. We shouldn't forget the importance of community. I believe that with pubs closing, areas of foodservice will become the local meeting points. **Debbie Robinson**

## **Distribution must radically improve**

In forecourts we want to see more dwell time. With electric vehicles becoming more prevalent, we'd like to see people staying on our site for at least 15 minutes for the charge. While they're here, they have a range of services to use - like Amazon Lockers – and we also want to see them enjoying some quality food as part of their experience. **Steve Fox**

## **Stores need help becoming exciting on social media**

Suppliers please come forward. Recommended planograms are consistent wherever you go. Perhaps the lack of continued success in the multiples is because it's difficult to distinguish between them. The discounters have done things differently, bringing in new products twice a week, creating something more exciting. **Debbie Robinson**

**How do you get a  
convenience  
store more  
instagrammable?**

Kevin Hunt



**NPD**



# New products must be stocked faster and be more exciting

**NPD plays a critical role for the convenience sector, but supply chain issues are preventing new products ending up on retailers' shelves.**

## **New products have to get to independents faster**

Wholesalers need to act with the consumer in mind. I want the products on shelf that consumers have seen on a side of the bus. It is frustrating when wholesaler fees have to be paid by suppliers and it can take months to get a new product on shelf. It's an easy win for independent delivered wholesale. **Kevin Hunt**

## **Wholesalers are finding solutions**

Our new 'Box Out' concept takes risk away and supplies NPD to retailers free of charge. If it sells, they then buy the next order. **John Kinney**

## **Suppliers must get their offer right**

For emerging brands, it's much better to get a distributor so it can be ordered with a mixed pallet. Make the pack small enough, make the unit price smaller in wholesale, get it under £10. Get it price-marked and ensure the right shared margin is in there.

**John Kinney**

## **Stores are cautious of finding a balance**

We're reacting to consumer trends e.g. plant-based diets. People are shopping little and often, coming to our shop far more. We need to reflect what they see in a larger store, but a smaller range.

**Jonathan James**

**For the younger generations, everything has to be recommended online and we've got to tap into that.**

Kevin Hunt





### **Sampling is key**

Central England Co-operative has identified 40 stores with shoppers who are early adopters of trends and new products. We're always happy to do sampling in those – small brands have passion and the people in the business who can talk about them. **Debbie Robinson**

### **NPD from big brands must do better**

NPD from big brands is just boring. I look for a 'wow' factor and that's delivered more often by the small suppliers. **Mital Morar**

**Nine times out of 10, a rep from a big brand is only pushing NPD because they need to get rid of it.**

Amrit Singh

# PROMOTIONS



# Promotions need to be about adding value

**Deep discounting is the exact behaviour that created so many issues for the supermarkets. Switched-on retailers and wholesalers will not make the same mistakes.**

## **NPD pricing strategies**

We've become known for NPD because we actively source it to launch it locally first, shout about it and make it work for us by charging a premium. I've got people who come in and see what's new. I have dedicated zones for new products and promotions, which incentivise me to find products to fill it.

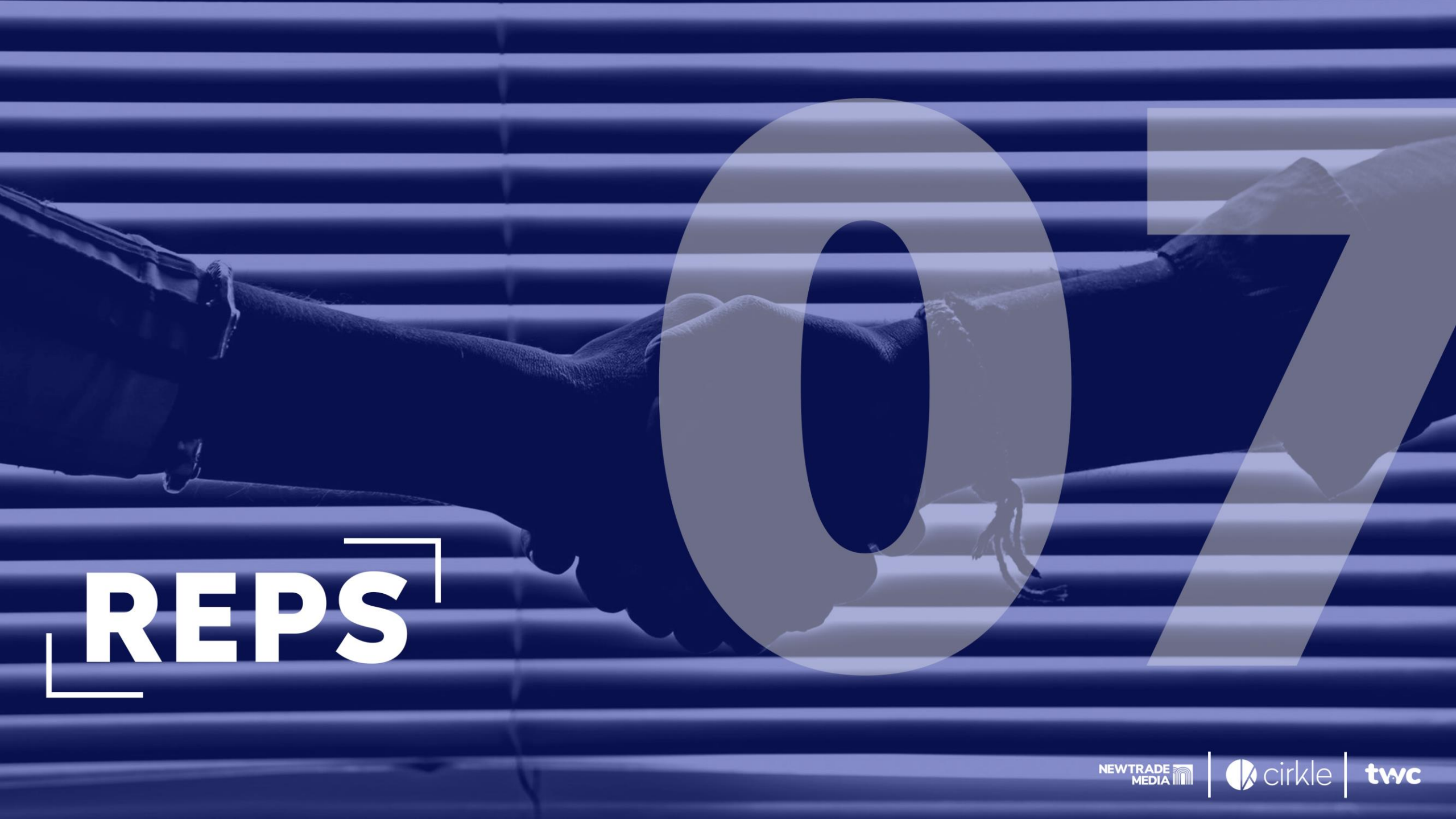
**Amrit Singh**

## **Suppliers need to Premiumise where they can**

We've been encouraging our suppliers to look at gifting and making their packaging more exciting. 23% of the UK population buy toiletries gift packs at Christmas - an emergency Christmas purchase - but that as an opportunity is now being seen. Matalan and TK Maxx invest in personal care, which you wouldn't have thought would be on the agenda for a clothing retailer. **Clare Bocking**

## **The time is right for Sustainable promotions**

The big supermarkets are taking plastic out of multipacks and moving to this incredibly simple thing called 'buy x for a price'. It creates a debate for the convenience sector about how we incentivise multiple purchases. We need to work out how we promote sustainably. **Neil Turton**



REPS



# Rep visits must deliver better results for retailers and suppliers

**Retailers and wholesalers want insight from suppliers, but reps are currently not doing the job. Suppliers must invest, rather than remove this resource, to drive better results for all.**

## **Rep visits can be a frustrating experience**

I don't spend any time with reps that just turn up as I'm often in the middle of something. The amount of times that reps turn up when the decision maker isn't there is ridiculous - suppliers are investing a massive amount of money in the wrong way.

**Steve Basett**

## **Suppliers can learn a lot from spending time in stores**

It's useful to walk in the shoes of retailers. Some people believe that relationships are dead and it's all about data, but relationships are really important. **Neil Turton**

## **Investment in reps needs to pay off more**

We need to help big branded suppliers to work out how to do the right stuff. How do we do more efficient logistics and packaging removals? As a branded supplier, when your margins are getting challenged, how you create a route to market that competes is really difficult. We need to make the sector commercially viable.

**Clare Bocking**

## **The call for genuine insight**

I would turn a rep into a 'brand relationship manager' - coming with information and trends that will help me learn, rather than just trying to put me on a rewards scheme.

**Amrit Singh**

**I get so many agencies and I feel like they don't care what's going on and they're just there to sell**

**Amrit Singh**

# Final Word



**One thing is certain – this is one of the most competitive and challenging, yet collaborative and exciting industry sectors, where peer-to-peer advocacy, endorsement and support is truly alive and kicking.**

The other is that there is perhaps still a disconnect between brand HQs and c-store owners. How do we join the dots when there are so many moving parts and varying agendas?

At Cirkle, our trade teams continue to walk in retailers' shoes - accompanying our clients' sales reps on customer store visits, as well as 'working the shop floor' to experience challenges first hand and hear

conversations that are happening live in store. Only by doing this can we gain the richest, most actionable insights to feed our clients' communications strategies and create innovative, relevant and impactful campaigns that deliver on a commercial level.

**Amy Searle**  
**Head of Trade**  
**Cirkle**



**The convenience sector has done a brilliant job adapting to consumer and market changes over the last 20 years.** The c-sector is as important to shoppers today as it was when I first joined HIM in 1997, but it can't rest on its laurels. We need a thriving independent retail sector, supported by a forward-thinking wholesale and route-to-market infrastructure to ensure shoppers return to our stores for the next 20 years.

I'd urge the sector to embrace 'data' more fully - competitor channels are data-lead superpowers and this includes digital competitors like Amazon. We shouldn't fear data – it's the oil that powers our competitors' strategies.

It allows us to understand our customers better than ever before whilst delivering a truly personalised offer to customers (cutting waste and increasing sales & profits). With almost every digital strategy underpinned by data, if we want to increase our digital capabilities, we need to start with getting our data proposition optimised.

Wishing everyone an exciting and successful 2020 – be brave, keep listening, and remain [data] hungry!

**Tom Fender**  
**Development Director**  
**TWC: The Whole Sale Co**



# Want to hear more?



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All proceeds from the event went  
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