



wagamama

101 / **Marketing Society Awards For Excellence**
Marketing on a shoestring

Stimulating sampling on a shoestring. How we used the senses to open minds and mouths to Wagamama.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Good food should satisfy all the senses, it should open mouths and open minds”

The Way of the Noodle¹

Having once been seen as one of the most innovative and cool restaurants on the UK high street, by late 2013 Wagamama’s star had dimmed. Why? It had become a victim of its own success. So enamoured by the “tried and tested” top three Wagamama dishes were the UK public that they had stopped ordering anything else. Which meant that they visited less often. After all, you can only eat so much Chicken Katsu Curry, right?

This is the story of how we stimulated the senses of the British public on a shoestring, and opened their mouths and minds to a tasty selection of new dishes, using every sense other than taste. Our approach has had a long term impact on the variety of dishes ordered at Wagamama and has both brought more people through Wagamama’s doors and got them to visit more often, delivering a £3.86 return on investment for every £1 spent. And we have a rather unlikely hero in this story: the humble paper placemat.



Word count: 188

¹“The Way of the Noodle” was published in 1994; the founding text of Wagamama, it outlines the principles upon which it was founded, many of which still remain core to the business today.

Bringing the noodle to Britain

“We believe that to be a good student is not to reproduce the same recipe but to adapt it, reflecting the essence of our time and making it better by making it for ourselves and in our own way”

The Way of the Noodle

In 1992, the first Wagamama in London’s Bloomsbury opened. A Japanese inspired noodle canteen aimed at feeding the people, it became an overnight success. Londoners were hooked on the unpronounceable but delicious delights of gyoza, yaki soba and katsu curry and the buzzy environment and canteen style seating.

As it opened more and more restaurants, the whole of the UK fell under Wagamama’s spell, with many people prepared to queue to get their noodle fix. It wouldn’t be uncommon to pass a young 20 something sporting a t-shirt with the recognisable Wagamama star on its front, such was the brand appeal.

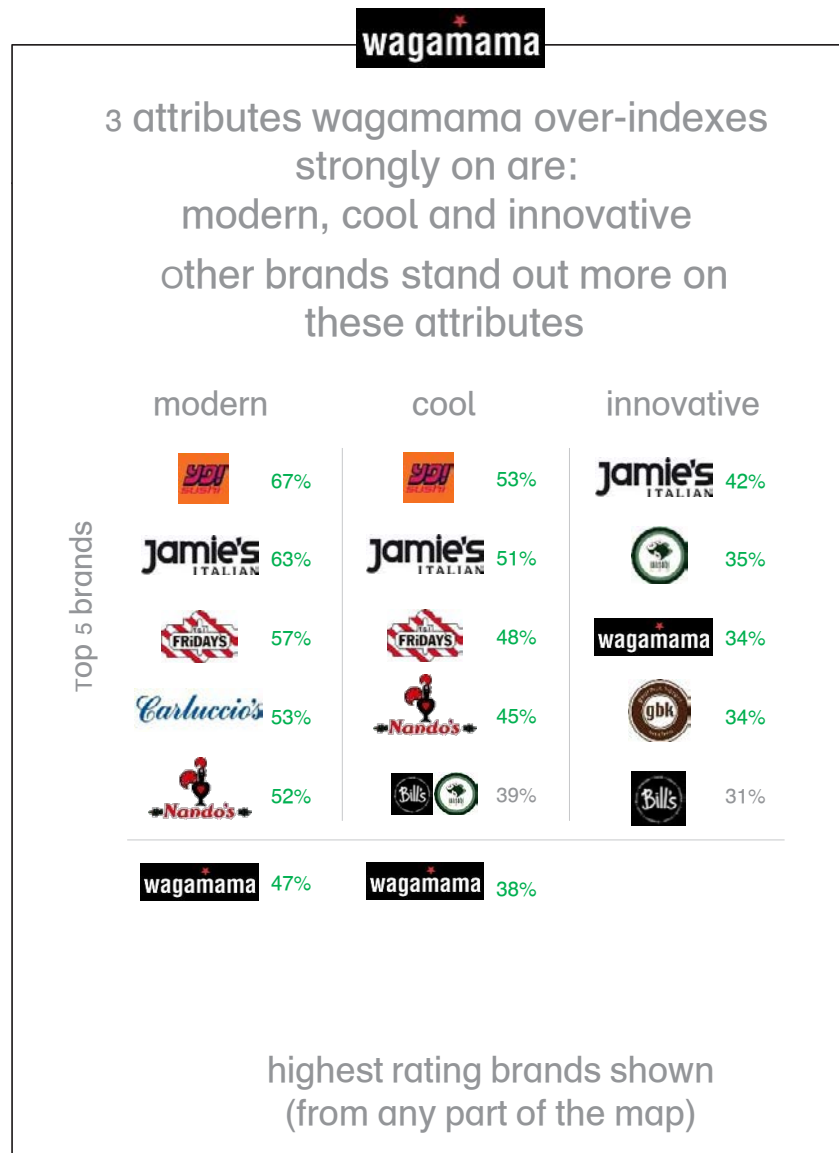
Being new ain’t enough

Fast-forward more than 20 years, and almost 100 new store openings, and the queues were dwindling. The high street had changed. Asian food was no longer unique and communal seating and quirky service was no longer Wagamama’s sole preserve. New pretenders, Jamie’s, Carluccios and Nandos were felt to be more modern, cooler and more innovative. By the end of 2013, people’s heads were being turned away from Wagamama, and, as a result, we experienced one of our first like-for-like sales declines².

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(For Judges Eyes Only)

Wagamama's core heartland of modern, innovative and cool being eroded³



Wagamama's success had been built on recommendation not media spend. But faced with falling sales and an ambitious growth plan to open new restaurants, for the first time in their history, they made the unprecedented decision to put aside a small budget to test the impact of a communications campaign. We couldn't rely on the traditional tactics of coupons and set deals: we had to use our budget creatively and for long-term growth.

A victim of our own success

Further interrogation of the problem threw up some interesting facts that helped to define the role for communications.

Whilst Wagamama ranked inside the top ten of its competitive set on many key brand measures, it ranked only 20th on visit frequency with a visit frequency of 3.7 which was below the category average of 3.9⁴

METRIC	RANKING
Brand advantage	4th
Momentum	7th
Favourite brand	9th
Penetration	10th
Frequency	20th

³Clear Quant Research

⁴Morar Consulting, Big Restaurant Survey, December 2013

On the face of it, given the exciting and delicious range of our menu, frequency should have been a strength for Wagamama, but till receipts told a different story. Almost a third of our mains sales were just three dishes⁵ with the other two thirds coming from a long tail of thirty seven other dishes.

Qual research put a bit more colour on the problem for us.

"It really is its own thing isn't it"

Wagamama consumer research

Wagamama had successfully managed to carve itself out as a sub category of one. It's not bucketed in with the usual suspects of "Thai", "Chinese" or "Italian". In the words of one consumer *"it really is just Wagamama"*.

"I always order the same thing - it's my absolute favourite"

Wagamama consumer research

In-restaurant research spotlighted an internal battle between adventure and habit. Shall we go for the tried and tested personal favourite, or would we be tempted to try something new? Having flirted seriously with the idea of trying something new, more often than not, the old favourite won out.

In fact, this was such a familiar grapple that BuzzFeed even labeled it as 'the existential crisis of visiting Wagamama⁶'

Buzz feed article

3. The waiter gives you a seat, but you already EXACTLY know what you want to order.



Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry. Chicken katsu curry.

4. You then experience guilt when you are tempted to eat something different on the menu but you can't.



"Maybe next time I will eat the (you look at the menu) mahi mahi curry... Next time I will try something new and broaden my horizons. Take risks!"
Guaranteed what you will say to the waiter 10000%: "a chicken katsu curry please."

⁵31.3% of mains participation was in the top three dishes.

⁶For the full article, please visit <http://www.buzzfeed.com/scottybyran/12-reasons-you-have-an-existential-crisis-when-you-eat-at-wa#.e01B7y3Kk>

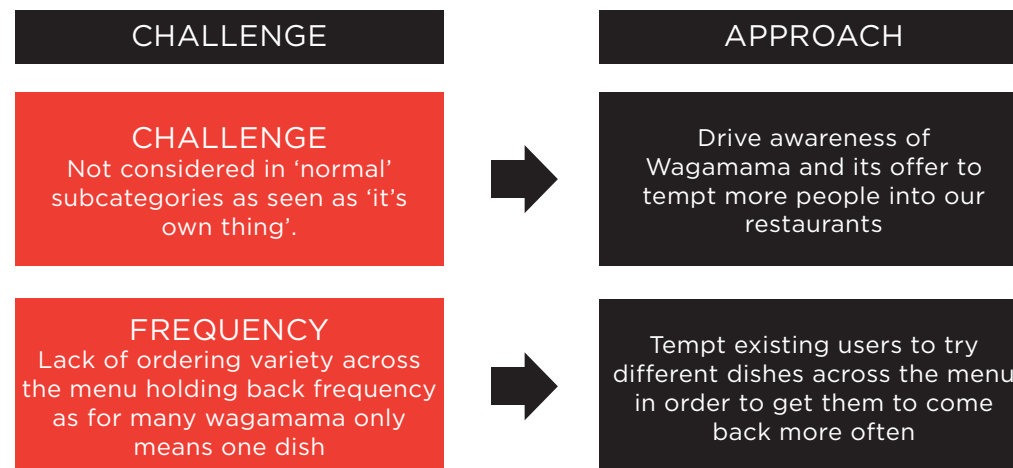
Defining the way for Wagamama

We had become victims of our own success, with a clearly defined problem.

1. Wagamama was considered a category in itself, which held people back from considering it when weighing up all the options on the high-street, as we weren't always top of mind.
2. We had been so successful at introducing previously unheard of dishes like Katsu Curry and Yaki Soba to the UK that people had to be craving a particular dish to visit, which was holding back our frequency.

On a limited budget of under £250k we would need to drive both penetration and frequency. We needed to tempt more people to try our noodley goodness, but we also needed to break existing customers out of their katsu haze, and encourage them to come and try something new.

Wagamama communications challenge and approach



Engaging the senses

"Good food should satisfy all the senses, it should open mouths and open minds"

The Way of the Noodle

Our key asset in this temptation mission was the dishes themselves and their sensory quality. Time after time, we had heard our diners speak about the quality and appeal of our food and we had witnessed the almost visceral quality our dishes had, drawing people's eyes as soon as they came out of the kitchen.

A sample of many of the less familiar dishes on the menu convinced us that if Wagamama could successfully woo the nation with Chicken Katsu Curry, we could do the same for those relatively undiscovered delights such as Kare Lomen and Raisukaree.

The problem was, we weren't going to be able to recreate this menu sampling on a national scale, as our budgets simply wouldn't allow it.

We needed to find other ways to get people to 'taste' our food without actually tasting it.

Taste is more than just tongue driven. As the 'Consciousness and Cognition' Journal states:

"It's the combinations of taste, smell, the trigeminal system and touch, to which we add visual and auditory cues, that also influence our perception when tasting food"

We set ourselves the mission of bringing our dishes to life through every sense other than taste, creating what would essentially be a national "sampling" campaign on a shoestring.

Getting people into Wagamama

We selected four of the most visually tempting, exotic and imaginative dishes on the Wagamama menu as the heroes of our campaign. All of which we believed were underperforming versus their potential and all of which had a higher cash margin than the average main.

Then we used sight and sound to bring them to life.

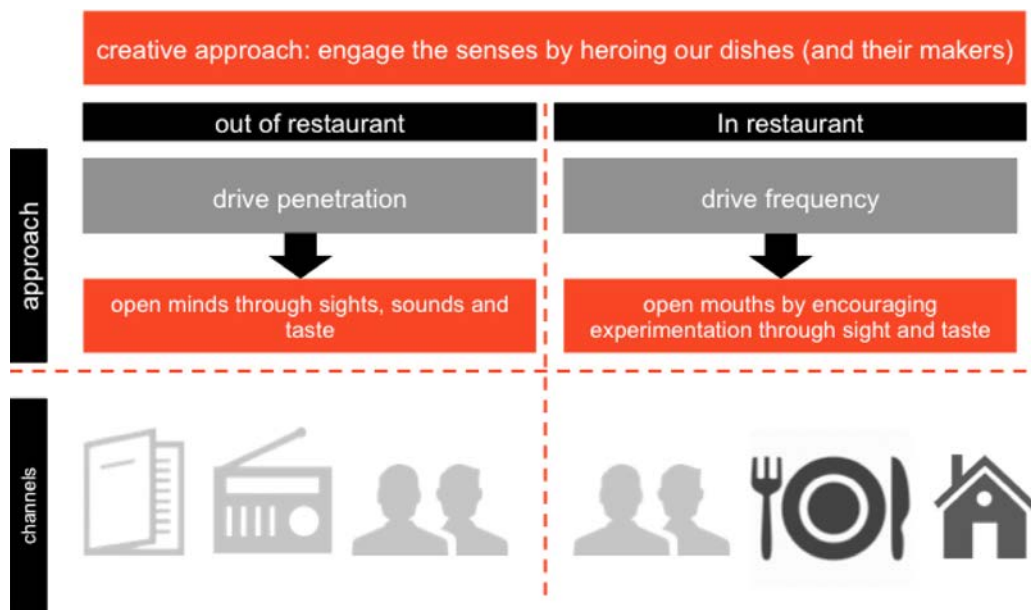
On radio, our chefs were heroed with their favourite dishes, evocatively describing every ingredient to the backdrop of the sounds of chopping, sizzling and stirring in the Wagamama kitchen.

Getting them to try something new

Whilst this medium could go a certain way to showcasing different dishes to existing customers and addressing our frequency objective, we had seen that sometimes despite best intentions, people would fall back on the tried and tested when it came to making their order.

How could we ensure we converted people at this moment of truth, without asking our staff to spend time convincing them to order something different?

The answer to this challenge lay right before our eyes and didn't cost us a penny: the humble Wagamama placemat. Up until now a simple blank sheet of paper to be scribbled on, the placemat offered us the perfect opportunity to showcase our dishes and let them visually seduce our customers into trying something new.



Our campaign went live at the end of January 2014 and overnight our placemats went from disposable doodled bits of paper to Instagramable shop windows for some of our most tempting dishes.



Campaign creative: Selected radio scripts

Wagamama Radio — 30”

Prawn Kare Lomen

We hear the sounds of a busy kitchen in the background.

VO: Mark, a chef at wagamama loves to make the Prawn Kare Lomen.

We hear the sound of our chef chopping, dicing, lighting the hobs and frying. It sounds delicious.

VO: The marinated prawns and coconut aromas dancing together. The spicy lemongrass soup, crunchy cucumbers, ramen noodles and...the slurp.

Mark understands however that this is just one of many tasty dishes. But next time you come to wagamama, try the Prawn Kare Lomen and slurp as loud as you can, just for Mark.

Because that's the way of wagamama.

Wagamama Radio — 30”

Grilled Duck Ramen

We hear the sounds of a busy kitchen in the background.

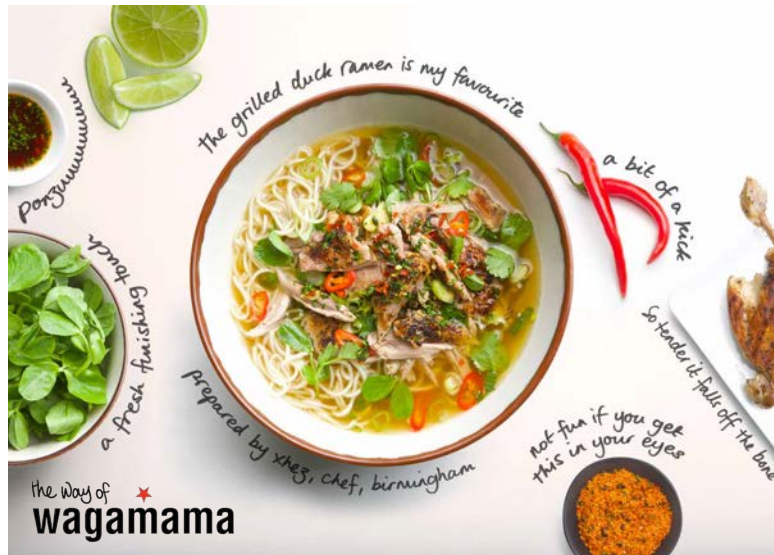
VO: Amal, a chef at wagamama loves making the Grilled Duck Ramen.

VO: the fresh spring greens ...chillies ...the citrusy PONZU sauce that lightens the tender grilled duck. He also likes saying PONZU. A lot. Too much.

But Amal realises this is a democracy and his favourite dish is just one of many, so next time you're in, think of Amal, even if it's just to say PONZU.

Because that's the way of wagamama.

Campaign Creative: Placemats

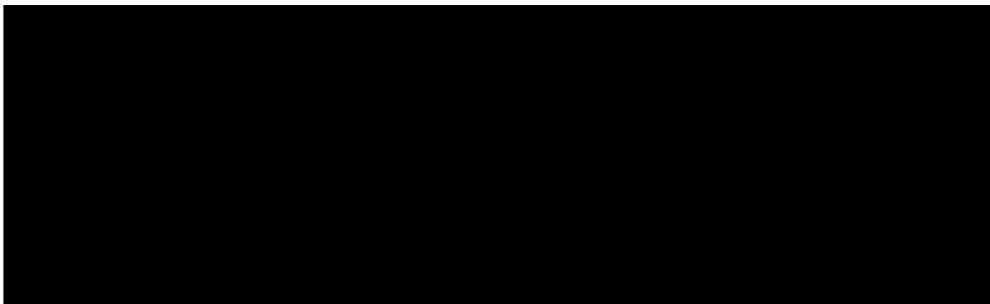


"Success in life is the result of good judgement"

The Way of the Noodle

Tempting more people to Wagamama...

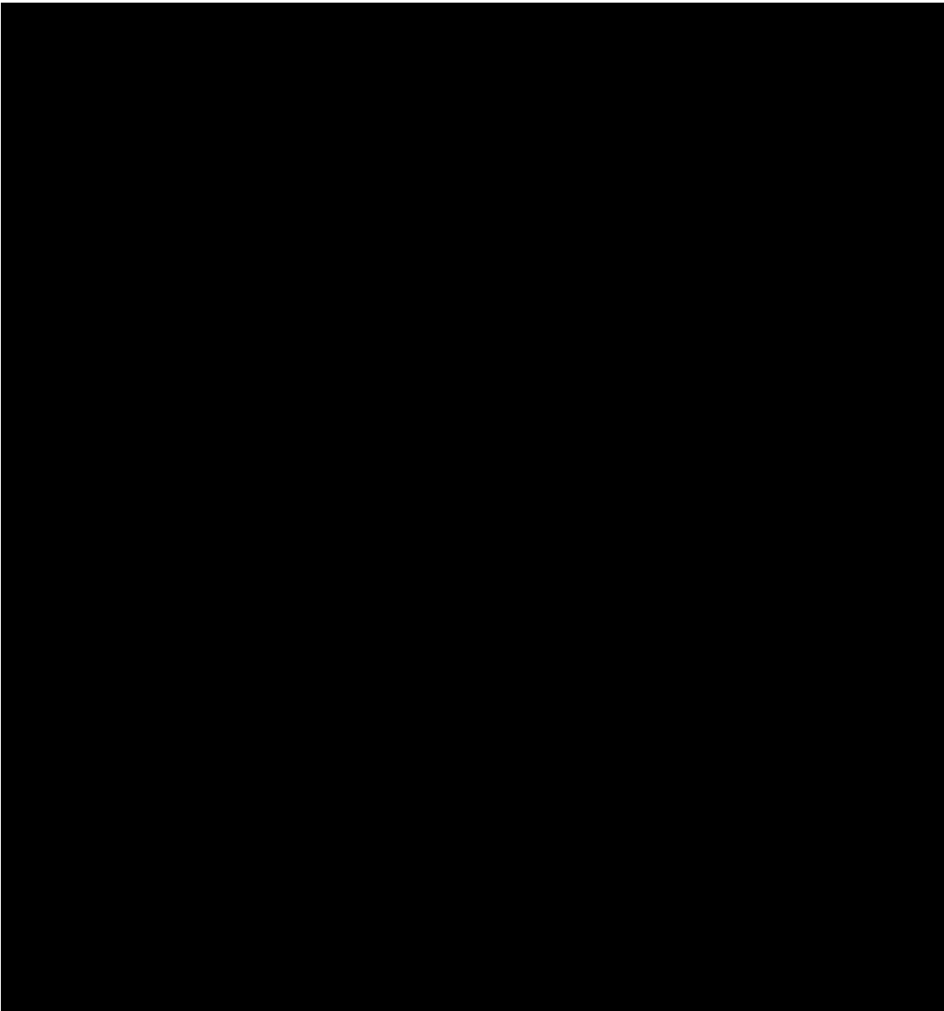
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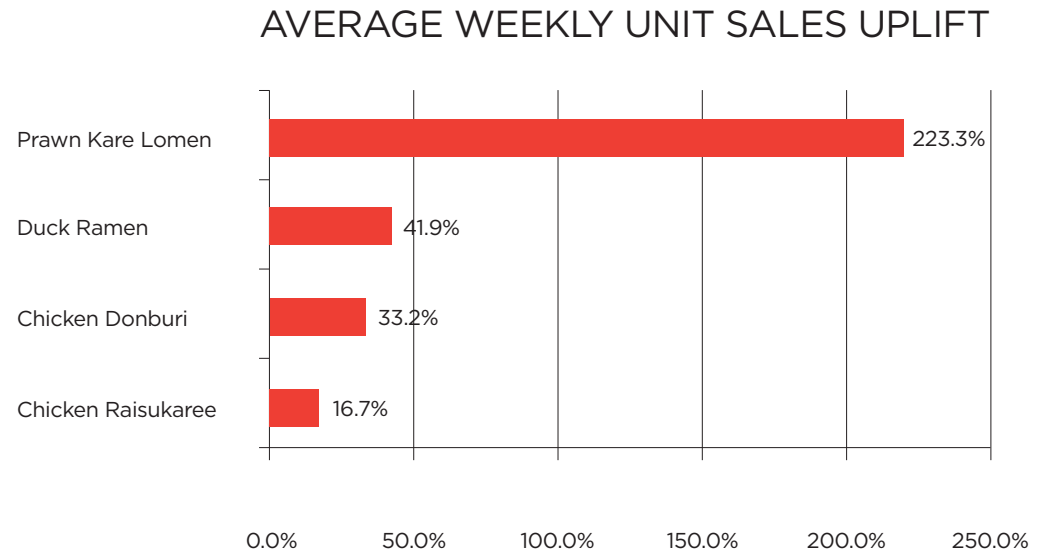
Tempting people to try something different

(For Judges Eyes Only)





Uplifts on featured dishes during campaign.



Importantly, these uplifts were not just flashes in the pan. The featured dishes now have a higher share of total mains than they did pre-campaign and, importantly, share of the top three dishes has declined, with customers now choosing a more varied set of dishes.

Vitally, these changes in mix have driven profit for the business as the average cash margin on the featured dishes is £1 more per dish than the average main.

Featured dishes share

MENU ITEMS	DURING CAMPAIGN SHARE OF MAINS INCREASE	SIX MONTHS POST CAMPAIGN SHARE OF MAINS INCREASE
Prawn kare lomen	+1.4%	+0.5%
Chicken donburi	+1.0%	+0.0%
Chicken raisukaree	+0.6%	+0.2%
Duck ramen	+0.5%	+1.0%

A decreasing reliance on the top 3 dishes.

MENU ITEMS	PRE-CAMPAIGN SHARE OF MAINS	SIX MONTHS POST CAMPAIGN SHARE	% CHANGE
Chicken katsu curry	17.4%	16.1%	-4.1%
Pad thai	6.6%	6.6%	—
Yaki soba	7.2%	6.6%	-0.6%
TOP 3 TOTAL	31.3%	29.3%	-2.0%

As a result of all this, restaurant visitors claimed that they were 8% more likely to revisit than they had been prior to the campaign⁹, placing Wagamama second in the category for revisit potential and demonstrating the strong impact of the campaign at tempting people into coming back.

As a result of the campaign's positive impact on both penetration and frequency, we saw a total uplift in like-for-like sales movement of 2.64% over the campaign period, which accounts for overall growth of 3.42%. This sales uplift accounts for a total sales uplift for the campaign period of £892,595.34.

Taking into account our total marketing investment of £231,000, this means that for every £1 spent, we got £3.86 back.

The New Way of Wagamama

This was a first foray into the world of brand communications for Wagamama on a very small budget. Less than a year later and such was the success of the first campaign, that we have now created another three in its wake.

⁹Brand Track, Likelihood to Revisit, October 2014

Wagamama follow up campaigns



In addition, due to the success of this campaign, there is a renewed focus on investing in building the brand. 2015 will see the national roll out of the new Wagamama brand and values campaign, ensuring that we stick to one of our founding principles of kaizen: constantly improving the Wagamama offer.

Conclusion

As the saying goes, variety is the spice of life. Our customer insight showed that Wagamama customers had lost their adventurous edge so we designed a campaign that was aimed at stimulating the senses, heroing four of our most visually and commercially attractive dishes and literally getting people to taste them with their eyes and ears.

The communications plan was designed to both open minds and mouths to the deliciousness of different dishes and small media budget meant that we had to use every pound well. This led us to perhaps one of our most powerful “media” assets to tempt people to try something new; the humble placemat, which then spread the word further via Instagram and Facebook. Best of all, it didn’t cost us a penny.

The campaign had an immediate impact on tempting people into Wagamama and seducing them to try something new, an impact that has endured beyond the campaign end date and ensured that consumers are less dependent on the top three dishes.

The campaign also led to a 3.42% like for like sales uplift, giving an ROI of £3.46 for every £1 spent - ensuring that integrated marketing and making the most of owned assets are both core to future of Wagamama; showing us that sometimes the most effective marketing assets can be those that are right under our noses!

Word Count: 1945