

The Collective Review

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INSIGHTS & TREND FORECASTS

2024



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2024 Highlights

TBC

products
launched
this year

2

New customers
joined

Celebrating 10 years



Jayne Edge
NPD Director

Welcome
our new
additions



Charlotte Warner Kevin Holgate Georgia Woods

Account Manager Process & Launch Manager Product Developer

Charlotte Warner

Charlotte has joined the team with over 12 years of experience working in buying and product development for household names like M&S, Paperchase, and innovative start-ups such as Simba Sleep. She's loving the chance to work in confectionery and enjoys the creative buzz of bringing new products to life. Now based in Liverpool, Charlotte loves exploring the city and spending time with her family.

Kevin Holgate

Kev is a seasoned food professional with expertise spanning Hot Eat Desserts, Chilled Desserts, Ready Meals, and more. Renowned for leading cross-functional teams and driving product launches, Kev combines technical process mastery with a focus on operational efficiency. Passionate about delivering quality and innovation, he ensures seamless product integration. Outside work, Kev enjoys traveling and family time, enriching his personal and professional journey.

Georgia Woods

Georgia is food obsessed and has always worked in the industry. Mostly at Booths head office, she has worked in product development and buying looking after fresh foods, bakery and chilled desserts. She has also worked as an Innovation Project Manager for Princes managing new launches for soft drinks and edible oils. Georgia is delighted to be back in a creative role, cooking up new ideas for delicious products, with the J&K NPD team.

FROM PASSION TO PLATE: INSIGHTS FROM AN M&S FOOD EXPERT



Hannah Thirkall is a passionate food expert and leader who has made her mark in the industry through her dynamic career journey. Starting out as a Buying Assistant at ASDA, she quickly discovered her love for creating innovative, customer-focused products. Now, as the Head of Trading for Impulse & Events at M&S, Hannah combines her deep understanding of food trends with the iconic brand's commitment to quality and innovation. From launching creative collaborations to driving sustainable sourcing, Hannah is at the forefront of shaping the products that delight M&S customers. Read on to discover her journey, proudest achievements, and her vision for the future of food at M&S.

Tell me about your journey so far. How did you get started in food?

My food career started by accident at ASDA as a Buying Assistant after speaking to a recruiter at a graduate fair. On day one, I was part of a Dragons' Den-style forum where suppliers pitched their NPD, and I knew immediately that it was a career I would enjoy. I was fortunate to gain experience across various food categories there, which I loved as I've always been a foodie. When a role at M&S aligned with my personal desire to move to London, it was a match made in heaven!

What's the best thing about working at M&S?

The food, obviously... and the passion everyone has for the brand. From my colleagues to the random texts from friends and family sharing their experiences with products they've bought—it's constant. Everyone loves M&S food, and it's a joy to work on creating the most delicious products year after year to delight customers.

What product or project are you most proud of?

This is a really tough question as I easily get super passionate about any category or project I work on. I've had the pleasure of working across both ambient and chilled areas. A few highlights include expanding the ASDA Free From range at a time when it was an unloved category, addressing a real need for customers who previously struggled to shop this area, and supporting small brands in securing major retailer listings.

I'm also particularly proud of many cross-functional projects and products I've worked on at M&S—such as the Slow Cooked meat range, the Marmite x M&S collaboration, and Limited Edition sandwiches, to name a few!

How do you balance quality, price, and sustainability when sourcing products?

This is really tricky, especially at a retailer so passionate about all three. But it's something we work hard on, as the winning formula is finding the right balance. For me, it's about the whole team staying close to the end-to-end product journey, understanding what adds value versus what is a 'nice to have,' having a clear product strategy that reflects customer needs and price ceilings, and fostering close supplier partnerships. These partnerships help unlock ongoing benefits, ensuring we have the right offer for our customers.

Where do you see the biggest opportunities for M&S in 2025 and beyond?

We have such great momentum right now. More customers are seeing us as more than just a retailer for special treats, which opens up opportunities in more categories than ever before. We need to be clever in curating our offer to cater to a wider range of people and occasions, but the possibilities are endless. We'll continue to innovate and surprise our customers to delight everyone who walks through our doors.

Thank you so much for your time Hannah!

To finish, I'd like to say a big thank you for your ongoing work with us. It's an incredibly exciting time to be part of M&S, with the growth we're seeing. Please keep delivering great products day after day!

INTRODUCING



Staying ahead of the curve requires more than just intuition; it demands actionable insights and data-driven decision-making. The J&K InnoVision Hub is our information-sharing service designed to empower our customers and partners with the knowledge needed to thrive. Our mission is collate and distribute customer sales data, trend insights, and competitor research, to provide a comprehensive platform that helps you understand market dynamics and consumer behaviour.

Whether you're looking to identify emerging trends or optimize your sales strategies, InnoVision Hub connects you with the information that matters most, driving innovation in your organisation and transforming data into opportunity.

Launching December 2024, keep an eye on your inbox for the following updates from innovision@jkconfec.com

What

- Customer Sales Data
- Trends & Packaging Reports
- Custom Trends Reports
- Benchmarking Results
- Comp Shop Results & Maps
- J&K 'Zine

When

- Monthly & Annual Summary
- Quarterly
- Adhoc
- Adhoc
- Adhoc
- Annually

Who to

- Supply Partners
- Customers & Supply Partners

Exploring Zurich:

A Winter Adventure With Our NPD team

Zurich is renowned for its world-famous Swiss chocolate, so it was an obvious choice for our J&K Product Development team to spend two inspiring days exploring this confectionery haven. The purpose of our trip was a competitor shop—delving into the local market to uncover new trends, gain inspiration, and ignite ideas for upcoming products. While full insights on packaging, flavour profiles, and concepts will be revealed in our January Innovision report, here's a behind-the-scenes glimpse at the personal experiences and unforgettable moments from our visit.

Why Zurich?

Switzerland's reputation for impeccable chocolate craftsmanship made Zurich the perfect destination for our exploration. As Belgian chocolate specialists, it is also essential for us to keep an eye on other specialist chocolate markets. It's no secret that Belgian and Swiss chocolate ranges often compete, and Zurich offered a unique opportunity to experience this rivalry firsthand. Home to some of the most iconic chocolatiers and innovative confectionery trends, the city offered an unparalleled mix of tradition and modernity. Its festive ambience during December added a touch of magic to our journey.

Day 1: Festivities and Flavours

We kicked off our adventure by strolling through one of Zurich's enchanting Christmas markets. Amid twinkling lights and the scent of mulled spices, we found plenty of flavour inspiration for seasonal products. The atmosphere was festive and invigorating, setting the tone for our exploration. Among the unique finds and (Jayne's product highlight) was a savoury Roquefort and hazelnut macaron, a surprising twist that left us both puzzled and impressed—who knew cheese and nuts could work so well in a macaron?

For lunch, we headed to Bachmann, a renowned chocolate store with a café that's a feast for the senses. Sitting on macaron-shaped chairs, we enjoyed beef and chicken empanadas and freshly baked pretzels while marvelling at the free-flowing chocolate wall and glass floor overlooking the store. One standout treat for Martin was Bachmann's Christmas Schützengeli—a winter edition filled with mandarin cinnamon ganache, covered in aromatic hazelnuts and milk chocolate. Even Martin, who isn't a fan of heights, couldn't resist the charm of this unique location (though his grip on the macaron chair suggested otherwise).

The afternoon saw us wandering through more shops, absorbing the festive window displays and diverse offerings. Among the discoveries was Jai's product highlight: a Kalamansi-filled chocolate that struck the perfect balance of tangy and sweet, leaving us all in awe of its bold flavour. As the sun set, we warmed up with a cup of Glühwein at another Christmas market, cosied up by a crackling fire. We also witnessed the most wholesome Christmas celebration, The Singing Christmas Tree, where children school choirs are in a giant tree singing festive songs.



Dinner was a decadent affair at Restaurant Enja, where we indulged in a culinary masterpiece. Starters included “The Carrot”—grilled carrots with wild garlic pesto, “The Goat”—caramelised goat’s cheese with pickled rhubarb, and “The Mushroom”—grilled lion’s mane mushroom with chanterelle chutney. Mains ranged from steak to chicken to pork, accompanied by spätzle, shoestring fries, and seasonal vegetables. Dessert was a highlight, with options like “The Winter Plum”—spiced plum compote with vanilla ice cream, and “The Apple Cake”—an apple crumble cake with rum-soaked raisins. If you’re ever in Zurich, Enja is a must-visit—just be prepared to waddle out afterwards.



To cap off the evening, we ventured to a rooftop for some intriguing cocktails. Favourites included the “Maneki-Neko” with rosé rye whiskey and lemongrass yuzu sake, and “Flower Power”—a blend of cranberry vodka, violet liqueur, and butterfly pea flower tea. Let’s just say some of the combinations were as bold as our fashion choices after a day of eating.



Day 2: Chocolate and Tradition

The second day began with a visit to the iconic Lindt Home of Chocolate, where we were greeted by a massive chocolate fountain and a sprawling 500m² shop filled with every imaginable delight. From there, we meandered through Zurich’s picturesque Old Town, soaking in its historic charm and cobblestone streets. It was here that we found Georgia’s product highlight: a dark chocolate shell filled with a creamy passionfruit filling, topped off with a Pâte de fruit-style passionfruit jelly—a true gem that perfectly balanced richness with a zingy twist.



For lunch, we embraced tradition at Swiss Chuchi, famous for its authentic Swiss dishes. We indulged in creamy cheese fondue and raclette served with crispy rösti, savouring every bite before it was time to roll ourselves onto the flight home.



A Taster of What’s to Come

Our trip to Zurich was as insightful as it was indulgent. While this article offers a glimpse into our experiences, the full Innovision trends report will dive deep into the cutting-edge concepts, packaging designs, and flavour profiles we discovered. Stay tuned for its release in January, and sign up for Innovision to ensure you don’t miss out on these valuable insights. Zurich has inspired us—and we’re excited to channel this inspiration into the future of confectionery at J&K.

In the meantime check out our Instagram where we share our comp shop journey pictures as well as new product launches.



PACKAGING: KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR 2025

Packaging remains a critical focus for our customers, covering everything from Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary packaging to Cartons, Corrugated materials, and of course, plastic. In light of this, here are my top five packaging tips to ensure your product not only reaches the consumer in great condition but also aligns with sustainability and cost-saving initiatives.

1. Incorporate at Least 30% Recycled Content in Plastic Packaging

Using a minimum of 30% recycled content in plastic materials is essential. This not only contributes to sustainability but also helps to reduce costs, particularly with the UK's Plastic Packaging Tax, which offers financial incentives for adopting more environmentally friendly packaging solutions.

2. Prioritize Strong Shelf-Ready Packaging & Outer Cases

Design packaging that is robust enough to withstand the rigors of palletising and stacking without crushing or damage. This ensures that products remain intact during transportation. Furthermore, well-designed packaging allows for easy restacking in store, maximizing space and driving higher sales volume by optimising shelf presentation.

3. Ensure Product Visibility

Whether in the primary packaging or the shelf-ready packaging, make sure the product remains visible and isn't obscured. Clear visibility helps catch the consumer's eye and ensures your product stands out on the shelf, leading to a better shopping experience.

4. Integrate Tamper-Evidence Systems

Incorporating tamper-evidence features directly into the primary packaging design rather than relying on external plastic tamper seals. This simplifies the process, reduces plastic waste, and ensures that the consumer receives a secure product.

5. Make Shelf-Ready Packaging Easy to Open

Design shelf-ready packaging with perforations that tear cleanly when pulled. This ensures ease of access for store employees and customers while maintaining the packaging's integrity during transit. It strikes a balance between convenience and strength, ensuring products stay secure but are easily accessible when needed.

Compliance and Specification Updates

Lastly, whenever introducing new or revised packaging, remember to keep our specifications up to date. Timely communication is crucial to ensure we have adequate time to support the necessary compliance work and maintain seamless supply chain operations.

As always, I'm here to assist. Please feel free to reach out to me at martin@jkconfec.co.uk if you have any questions or need further support.

Martin Bryan
Packaging Developer



ENDING 2024 ON A HIGH NOTE: Reflecting on Success and Preparing for the Future at J&K

As 2024 comes to a close, it's the perfect time to reflect on the many successes we've achieved at J&K this year. From new launches to operational improvements, we've made significant strides across all areas of the business. However, we know that the work doesn't end here. We're focused on building upon our achievements and continuing to grow in 2025.

Celebrating 2024's Wins

One of the standout achievements for the technical team of 2024 has been receiving an outstanding audit grade for the third consecutive time. The audit, which is conducted every other year, highlights our ongoing commitment to maintaining the highest standards across all aspects of our operations. Achieving this level of consistency over six years reflects the dedication and hard work of every team member at J&K and the commitment within our supply base. This recognition strengthens the trust we've built with our customers and suppliers, and reinforces our reputation for operational excellence.

This year, we've also been fortunate to recruit some exceptional talent to join the J&K family. The new additions to our team have brought fresh ideas, expertise, and enthusiasm, which have already begun to have a positive impact on our work. Their contributions, alongside the hard work of our existing team, have helped drive our continued success and positioned us well for the future.

A Positive Outlook

As we close out 2024, we have much to celebrate. The third consecutive outstanding audit grade is a testament to the dedication and hard work of everyone at J&K, and the progress we've made throughout the year reflects our collective effort. Looking to 2025, we are excited about the opportunities ahead. We want to streamline our processes and improve collaboration across the board. Together, we will continue to push for excellence, embrace new challenges, and ensure that J&K remains a leader. Thanks for your continued support. Here's to 2025!

A big thank you to everyone!

James Shelly
Technical Director

Looking Ahead to 2025: Streamlined Processes, and Greater Efficiency

As we look ahead to 2025, our focus will be on further modernising our systems and working more intelligently. While 2024 was the year of building the best team, the next step in our evolution is the implementation of new software that will significantly improve key aspects of our operations and enhance the experience for both our internal teams and external partners.

A major initiative for the year ahead is the rollout of a new software platform that will streamline critical functions across the business. This system will be accessible to all our partners and will focus on three key areas: complaints management, audit reporting, and critical path management.

Complaints Management: The new system will simplify how we track and resolve complaints, ensuring faster response times and more transparent communication with our partners and customers.

Audit Reporting: We will be improving our audit reporting capabilities, making it easier to access, track, and analyse audit data. This will not only improve the efficiency of our audits but also provide real-time insights that help us proactively address potential challenges and ensure ongoing compliance.

Critical Path Management: The software will enable better management of project timelines and milestones, ensuring that all teams and partners are aligned and can work together more efficiently, removing duplication for us all.



