

“Innovation within the Crabbie’s brand is a great example of how we look at NPD – it’s all about relevancy to brand proposition and timing”



Richard Clark
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Richard Clark talks to **Andrew Don** about how Halewood is always on the lookout for the next Crabbie’s, as it looks to drive innovation across all the drinks categories in its portfolio

How have you continued to drive forward founder John Halewood’s entrepreneurial vision in NPD?

Halewood’s innovation programme remains one of the three main strategic pillars along with our international focus and brand building. The plan is brought to life by the business significantly increasing its focus on consumer research, customer business programmes and supplier partnership schemes.

This focus has been combined with what we have learned from John Halewood’s visionary approach to take on the competitor and economic challenges ahead. Employees understand the importance of this and buy into the philosophy of creative independence and innovation every day.

Where will the most NPD be in your business in the next five years?

We are focusing on cider, flavoured beers, spirits, ready-to-drink products and liqueurs as core areas. However, the alcohol industry is constantly evolving and you have to move quickly to be aligned to consumer trends and retailer initiatives, and keep one step ahead of competitors. We have new products in development that fit into our two annual innovation cycles. Our autumn research programme developed 14 concepts and was followed by a further 12 in March that remain under review.

What has your most recent NPD entailed?

We have launched more than 50 new SKUs in the UK and internationally in the past year, including brand extensions and agency brand developments. Halewood remains committed to bringing new products to the marketplace, as the recent launch of Lazy Jack’s American-style, cloudy apple cider reflects.

You’ve expanded Crabbie’s – can it be stretched any further?

Innovation within the Crabbie’s brand is a great example of how we look at all NPD – it’s all about relevancy to brand proposition and timing. Halewood has developed John Crabbie’s in the soft drinks fixture, Crabbie’s Original and fruit flavoured Crabbie’s in the ale fixture, as well as Crabbie’s Fruits in the RTD category. So the brand has now been extended to appeal to 22-65 year olds.

We are careful not to overstretch the Crabbie’s offer because we need to invest in all new concepts and remain true to the brand. There will be innovation in the future but only if consumers tell us to do so.

How will the drinks market develop?

The trends of fruit and sweet, and lower-alcohol will be prevalent in the short to medium term, and this can work across RTDs, ciders and spirits.

What is the importance of NPD in relation to marketing and selling existing established brands?

Our customers expect us to continually review our portfolio, and only Lambrini and Caribbean Twist remain within our core range from five years ago. NPD is also important from a consumer insight

Halewood is looking to innovate within the Crabbie’s brand



perspective. We share what we learn with the brands team, and this helps to generate brand extensions in the future.

What room is left for vodka extensions, RTD variants and new rum products?

The scope for vodka is all about the branding and the serve, to develop consumer usage and occasions. This plan then needs to have at its core an on-trade bar engagement with a detailed bartender programme a prerequisite to success. For RTD’s, there are many opportunities, such as the trend for fruit and refreshment.

Spiced rum derivatives are prominent and the trick here is to balance new flavours and serves alongside brands’ evolution. Consumers have demonstrated how brand heritage combined with new taste experiences are success stories for brands in the UK.

How much scope is left for cider and the alcohol-free market?

Consumers have a high propensity for trying new cider products. Add to this the dynamics and trends of cider around the world and you can see that the category has a positive future. The alcohol-free wine sector has recently started to show some exciting signs of growth, with Nielsen data showing Eisberg outperforming the market. Key trends suggest Eisberg has a big future with changing lifestyles and you are likely to see lots of activity in future.

What have been Halewood’s biggest NPD successes and failures?

Crabbie’s, the re-emergence of Lambrini, John Crabbie’s soft drink portfolio and Lamb’s Spiced Rum have been big successes. We expect Bootlegger vodka and Whitley Neill gin to continue to make an on-trade impact.

We believed Café Kiss was promising, but translating innovation to a category such as coffee, which is understood for its occasion, usage and relevancy, is not always easy.

I would suggest our success rate is one in four. But we should remember that just because we launch or test a product which is then withdrawn, we should not always see this as failure. We often learn as much from our failures as we do our successes. **11**

