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COFFEE HOUSE



Scoop Malone, the tea and coffee trade's top news writer, now reports for you every month!

July 2011

The cafe trade fails to defend its place in the modern high street

There is a danger that the coffee-house trade will go unrepresented when the Mary Portas report on 'the national high street' is presented to the government this autumn. The 'shopping consultant', famous from her TV shows, has been hired by the government to report on the retail mix of Britain's high streets.

It is said that she wishes to halt the 'clone town' phenomenon, in which all high streets are filled with the same kinds of business, and the purpose of her work is to 'explore new business models for high streets relevant to the modern consumer... and recommend what action government should take to create diverse, sustainable high streets'.

It is the subject of diversity which has regularly come up in criticism of the coffee-shop trade from a vast number of local authorities, who have commented in many recent planning decisions that they see the coffee-shop trade, either in big-name chain or independent form, as a major threat to the desired 'retail mix' of their shopping areas.

This image is not helped by a new report from the Simply Business insurance company, which says that coffee shops now make up 11 per cent of high street businesses, up one per cent from last year. The highest proportion of coffee shops per high street is in Wales, the south west, and the north east; Manchester is cited as having more than the average coffee shops while fewer restaurants and pubs.

In yet another study, the world's third-largest commercial estate company, Colliers, says that over a third of high streets in the UK are either 'degenerating' or 'failing', with high streets being 'dominated by takeaways', or simply



Will Mary Portas stand up for coffee shops or see us as a threat to retail diversity?

vacant - three years ago, six per cent of high street shops were vacant, and by the end of 2010 the figure had grown to 14 per cent. At this rate, says Colliers, over a third of city centre shops will be boarded up in two years' time. Margate has already been cited as having reached that figure.

It has been suggested that the beverage trade should put together a concerted submission to prove its value to the high street, as some other trades are doing.

The British Independent Retailers' Association has promised to become involved with the Portas report on behalf of independent businesses in general, but has not responded to enquiries about coffee shops. The Association of Convenience Stores has spoken of its own campaign in support of its members, and both the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers and the British Beer & Pub Association are working on submissions to 'provide evidence on the strong role their members bring to the high street'.

Mary Portas herself has said: "I am calling on business, local authorities and shoppers to contribute their ideas on how we can create town centres that we can all be proud of," but her office has not responded to a series of enquiries about whether she will welcome a submission on behalf of the

coffee-house and tea-room trades.

By contrast, the appropriate government department has told us that they certainly are interested in 'evidence, analysis and figures'.

The Coffee Council, the small think-tank which recently highlighted the scalding issue and the pressure-vessel issue, has recommended that the trade should work together to make a submission to the Portas report. However, enquiries by this magazine have failed to show any enthusiasm for doing so.

Only one company has said it would wish to be allied to a trade submission, and that was a supplier of a fringe product.

Of the big chains, Caffe Nero has said it would 'perhaps' associate itself with a trade submission; Costa made the neutral remark that it would wait to see the report.

If this situation continues, the café trade may well become seen as a convenient whipping-boy when the Portas report is published.

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Perhaps not a good idea to try this in your own coffee shop...! The giant Italian coffee brand Illy doesn't do things by halves... following runs in New York, Milan, Trieste, Istanbul and Berlin, the Galleria Illy will run in London from 12th September to 16th October, at Flos and Moroso, an Italian design house. In Italian terminology, 'The Galleria represents the efforts of Illy to express physically its love of art, culture and science with its passion for the finest coffee'. In practical terms, the event will include espresso cups designed by many leading artists. This picture comes from one of last year's exhibitions.

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There has been yet another twist in the legal actions raised by Nescafe over rivals making a coffee capsule that can be used in the Nespresso machine. In March, the European courts said that rivals could carry on selling compatible capsules – now, on appeal, the Swiss Supreme Court has ruled for Nestle, calling for the earlier decision to be 'reconsidered'.

The upmarket department store Harvey Nichols has taken on Bubbleology, the bubble-tea café which opened in Soho in May and sold 8,000 teas in the first two weeks. The product will be served in Harvey Nichols from July.

The Irish press has made a remarkable attack at hospital cafes, accusing them of 'ripping off' a captive customer base. The charity Friends of the Elderly said that branches of branded coffee shops in hospitals charge more than they do at city centre outlets. In the examples given, the differences were of just a few cents (in Euros) but the charity alleged that hospital coffee shops have lower rents and overheads, and should therefore charge less. A member of the coffee trade has pointed out that hospital cafes probably do not, in total, have much less costs than high-street shops.

Fracino, the Birmingham maker of espresso machines, is to sell in Germany. It has appointed a distributor in Hamburg.

A café chain in Vancouver has begun a lawsuit against 150 un-

named people, following riots in the city after an ice-hockey final last month. Blenz Coffee had windows smashed and property stolen at three sites, and has made 150 claims against people named 'John or Jane Doe', saying that real names will be inserted as rioters are identified.

Starbucks has won the New Media Age effectiveness marketing award, for its Starbucks Rewards campaign through Facebook and mobile-phone vouchers, to promote rewards in certain target areas. As a direct result, Starbucks quickly doubled its Facebook community to 360,000 fans, and registered 10,150 downloads for mobile vouchers giving free filter coffee on the first day of the campaign.

Yael Rose, who put on the Tea & Coffee Festival at the South Bank in London this Spring, has invited the trade to put forward opinions about the dates of her next events - there may be one on 18-20 November 2011, and either 9-11 March or 27-29 April, 2012.

Clipper, the Fairtrade tea company, is launching a range of Fairtrade roast-and-ground coffee. It is aiming at the multiple grocery market.

Costa Coffee in Portishead, owned by Stuart and Lynn Montgomery, has been named as the best franchise in the brand's UK chain. They plan to expand with another in Bristol, at Clifton.



Readers will know that this magazine is sited barely a mile from the UK's only commercial tea plantation; we are now sad to report a setback at the equally rare coffee farm, run by Chris Bader of Guernsey in an attempt to grow and roast his own beans. "Guernsey is the Coffee Capital of the Channel Islands," he told us. "Despite it being the sunniest and warmest isle, we have had a storm which put a bloody great hole in the greenhouse, after which the weather decided to snow, which is not good for coffee. We are trying again with a new crop, but it will now be a few more years before I get my beans."

Waitrose will not open high street cafes - but Twinings may

The Waitrose chain has denied press reports of plans to open a chain of standalone coffee shops throughout Britain's high streets. However, Twinings seems to be on track to do so.

Managing director Mark Price was reported as telling a retailing conference that he would do so, but the company has now confirmed to us that what he actually said was that he has trialled his new café concept in a number of branches, and will develop it throughout his chain in time. He did add that 'some time in the future' he might consider a standalone café, but that was simply a passing comment, not a strategic plan.

Twinings looks to be the next big name on the high street - we reported recently that the tea brand had hired a property agent to find it a major London retail site, to develop the retail business of its famous Strand shop, which is very nearly 300 years old, and which receives around 5,000 visitors a week. It has now been reported that Stephen Twinning is 'drawing up a blueprint that could result in a chain of tea shops across the country'.



The facade of Twinings' shop in the Strand in London, one of the oldest surviving shops in Britain - will this be seen around the country?

The European Commission will not now be giving Twinings a grant of £10 million, which the press and MPs had alleged was being used to relocate production to Poland, thus losing British jobs.

The EC has confirmed that the grant cannot be used for such purposes; Twinings has protested that it did not intend to use the grant for that reason.

Tetley has launched an organic Fairtrade black tea as part of its Good Earth range, which comes in recycled packaging and features unbleached teabag tissue. Peter Haigh, the brand development manager, says that organic teas have hitherto been welcomed by caterers, but rejected by consumers for taste reasons. He adds, rather challengingly: "Good Earth teas are unique in that it is an organic tea range that does not compromise on taste."

Magrini of Birmingham, which distributes Vitamix blenders, will sponsor this year's Smoothie Championships, which will be held at the Lunch show in September.

The last two contests have both been won by the Shaketastic chain (pictured). Entries are open until 26th August.



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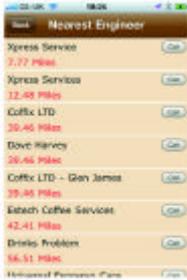
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The Rainforest Alliance will hold its first 'awareness' event this autumn - Rainforest Alliance Week will run from 19-23 September. There are very few details yet available, and so no suggestions at all about how the retail trade can benefit from the event. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defence has now taken on a Rainforest Alliance coffee for troops in operational situations - it has given a contract worth £375,000 to the charity Cool Earth, for an instant coffee using certified Brazilian beans. The coffee is made and packed by FFI.

The first I-phone 'app' for the location of espresso engineers has been created by Chris Palmer of Xpress, who is also the founder of the Association of Independent Espresso Engineers. It allows catering operators to locate their nearest engineer, and we are told that it has already been well used by those who run mobile espresso stalls at outdoor events.



Colombia's coffee farms have been recognised by the Unesco World Heritage List. Six areas have been highlighted as 'an exceptional example of a sustainable and productive cultural landscape that is unique and representative of tradition'.



Pic: Goff Ridley

If you've got it, shout about it...



Pic: Trudi Roark

There is nothing we like more than good cafe promotion - and these examples come from our home county of Cornwall. The Stowaway Tea Shoppe is in Port Isaac, where the Doc Martin TV series is filmed, and has moved fast for the souvenir trade. The Camelot Castle is in Tintagel, and makes a very bold claim... funny thing is, we still can't find out whose coffee they use!

Councils baffled by safety rules

The latest stage in the 'pressure vessel' situation is that certain local authorities are now being asked to state their policy in the matter, following the unexpected move by the New Forest District Council.

That council has contacted every coffee shop in its area with a questionnaire asking whether they know their machine details, the 'written scheme of examination', and when the last examination was done.

The council told *Coffee House*: "we are not aiming to take formal action against non-compliant businesses, but rather, we are being educational about the risk that these machines can pose to employees and to members of the public".

However, New Forest also added that coffee houses which do not respond can expect a follow-up.

In direct contrast, yet another council elsewhere has responded to an enquiry from an espresso engineer by virtually confessing ignorance of the entire subject.

Espresso Services of Borehamwood have now sent a letter to their local environmental health office, asking for the council's policy on the matter.

Anyone in the trade who cares to continue the campaign by copying the letter to their own council is invited to contact Louie Salvoni at 0844 692 2222.

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It has been said on many occasions that while 'shade-grown' coffee is a farming process which works well in many countries, it is not right for others, including parts of Brazil. The Ecologist has recently published a report criticising seventy per cent of Brazilian farms for producing 'sun grown' coffee, resulting in monocultural plantations and significant amounts of fertiliser and pesticides, claiming that South American and African countries are following suit, and recommending that its readers buy only shade-grown coffee. Importer Stephen Hurst of Mercanta commented: "most of the Brazil rain-forest is lost to soybean and ranching - I think even WWF would agree that coffee represents very little of this damage."

The World Bank is giving Nepal's coffee farmers \$35,000 to raise production and enhance organic coffee quality. At least 100,000 coffee trees are supposed to be planted. Another, unrelated, coffee development proposes to plant a million coffee saplings there every year. The local press says that coffee is now being grown in the foothills of the Himalayas, in areas where it was formerly grown until crop disease caused farmers to replace it with tea.

Anita Clark of Jenier World of Teas, based in Bridge of Weir, Scotland, has succeeded in selling Darjeeling tea back to India. The reason, it turns out, is that certain high quality Darjeelings are not readily available in India because the tea estates find it more profitable to export, and so the only way a customer there could get it was to buy it back from the UK. Jenier does have a conventional trade supply service within the UK.

In times when local cafes and district councils often seem to be at daggers drawn, Sharon and Tony McMurray of the Towcester Tearooms have put themselves in a position of

influence in local politics - they have taken over the coffee shop in the South Northants Council offices.

The six short-listed designs for the redevelopment of the Swiss Tea Rooms in Belper's River Gardens have been shown to the council, along with 371 consultation comments, but the winning architect has not yet been selected. Once a design has been selected, the council will be looking for applicants to operate the tea rooms on a tenancy basis.

Cafe Refresh of Kilsyth, Ayrshire, has won the local Paperclip Gourmet Awards for 'cafes within four miles of Kilsyth' (how very precise!) One unusual menu item is the Caffe Bonne, which is espresso with a shot of condensed milk - it is sometimes called caffe bon-bon, but we've never actually seen it on a menu before.

Percol has created a sampling campaign in which thousands of households in residential streets will be selected to receive a free jar. Percol says that it is now recognised as the top-selling brand of Fairtrade coffee.

The Sweetbird range by Beyond the Bean has won the 'Best New Product' award in the speciality beverage category at the big American coffee trade show in Houston. Sweetbird syrups, smoothies and sauces are the only range in the world to be approved by the Vegetarian Society and for vegan diets by Viva!

The UK staff of espresso machine maker La Cimbali UK took part in this year's London to Brighton cycle ride, and raised over £2,400 for the British Heart Foundation.

McDonalds has launched an Australian campaign aimed to make its McCafe brand 'the most loved' coffee name in the country. It features a money-back guarantee.

HMRC tax squad targets cafes

Following a newspaper report that the café sector can expect a tax crackdown, HM Revenue and Customs have confirmed to us that their next 'task force' will indeed investigate the café sector.

"This is based on a 'risk-analysis' process," we were told. "We create temporary specialist task forces to investigate risk areas. It is well documented that we recently investigated the plumbing fraternity.

"There is of course a cash element to café businesses, and so it will be necessary for us to look at various things, but we will approach it in two ways - on the one hand, for the smaller café operator who genuinely needs help to get their affairs in order, we shall help. On the other hand, we will certainly prosecute those who are deliberately evading tax."



Malmesbury Syrups, the independent maker of coffee flavourings, has become the first UK user of a 'revolutionary' new system of ESL (Extended Shelf Life) technology, which is described as something between normal 'chilled pasteurised' products, and a UHT/long-life product. It uses 'pulsed white light' to deal with pathogenic bacteria, but uses a tiny fraction of the energy associated with conventional heat treatments, and also allows Malmesbury Syrups to use lighter, clear and easily-recyclable packaging.

Costa looks to double in five years

Starbucks' accounts for the year to October 2010 show overall sales growth of two per cent, with a turnover of £396 million.

There was a loss of £34 million, which included £25 million in royalties to the parent company, and the figures also include the cost of the Borders administration, involving Starbucks in-house cafes in the closed bookstore chain - that was around £10 million. There was £24 million in investment on store renovation. The company now has 717 UK stores, employing 8,700 'partners', and claims over two million customers a week.

Costa says it has experienced 'strong growth' in the quarter to June, and Whitbread has said it will double the size of the coffee chain to 3,500 stores worldwide in the next five years.

Total sales were up 20.4 per cent to £182.5 million and franchised-store

sales were up 18.8 per cent. Like-for-like sales were up four per cent and transaction values up 5.1 per cent.

Costa opened 73 new stores in the quarter, and will add approximately 300 stores worldwide during 2011-12. Around 500 units will be re-branded as Costa Express and the total Costa Express/Coffee Nation estate will become around 1,100 units.

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Why has iced tea never taken off in the British trade? It is big in the States, as one confused writer (no, not this one!) once found out on a trip to California. Asking the breakfast waiter for tea, he added, in that quite unnecessary, meaningless, but very British way, 'a nice one, please'. You can guess how the traveller felt when, expecting a steaming English breakfast, he received a jar full of ice cubes, topped with a plastic umbrella.

And there is the problem, says the British tea trade. It's all a question of language and understanding - the British customer would like iced tea, if only it were presented to them well.

"The image is all wrong!" laughs Nick Kilby of Teapigs. "We are conservative in this country, 'tea' to us means something with milk and sugar, and so 'iced tea' tends to be thought of as 'a cuppa gone cold'! Another unhelpful thing is that many people have the impression of it as a cold and sugary lemon drink from a tea-bag.

"However, we are no longer a nation of builders' tea drinkers, and so we've been plugging iced tea for a couple of years... and now, in that lovely hot spell we had in spring, we began to see all the chain coffee bars promoting a trend of what we might call 'iced hot beverages'."

So, if the British customer is more inclined to try an iced beverage, what exactly can be done with 'tea'? It is very easy to get iced tea wrong, says just about every supplier. There is also a longstanding misunderstanding about brewing, which suggests that you have to prepare in advance, and leave to stand overnight, which is an old American method.

"We have experimented, and we have found that iced tea can be made, quick, in a catering situation," says Nick Kilby. "I served 1,700 iced teas at the Bath coffee festival, and that proved it!"

What's the method?

"If you use a conventional tea-bag, you will get a poor result. Our large-leaf pyramid gives a good result, and worked well on some surprising teas, even chocolate tea.

Just cover the pyramid with boiling water, and leave for three or four minutes, so you have a very concentrated hot infusion. Then top up with ice to jug level.

"The great thing that you find about this is that you can keep topping up that jug time and time again... we've kept one going for hours, which means that a relatively high-price pyramid tea-bag turns out to be far better value than you might think.

"The selling price is good - price it higher than your traditional tea, and serve it in a glass that looks nice, and you should get £1.75 or £1.95."

The general format of iced tea is a

Dawn of a new ice age?



Finally, say several suppliers, the UK public may be ready for that most profitable of all drinks – the iced tea. But first, we have to get over the image of 'a cuppa gone cold'...

fruit-based herbal infusion, and there is no shortage of them these days. However, there are now some adventurous ideas - green tea has been found to work well iced (garnished with cucumber instead of sliced fruit) and some makers have even experimented with what we might term 'real' tea.

At Drury, Marco Olmi has been experimenting with his new range of teas in pyramid bags.

"Iced tea doesn't just have to be fruit teas," he reports. "We did a food-pairing exercise for a restaurant show, and used iced lapsang souchong with smoked fish, and iced jasmine and iced Earl Grey with cakes and desserts.

"The lapsang souchong was fine for those who liked smoky tastes, others didn't. The jasmine is good if you choose a good jasmine, and a good tea bag - a cheap jasmine tea in a cheap tea-bag will be awful."

Although conventional everyday British tea is generally regarded as highly unsuitable for chilling, there is a school of thought that says certain light black teas and white teas might work well.

"I expect Darjeeling would be a good choice, and I'm going to try our Yunnan black tea to see if that works," says Olmi. "A thing to remember is to treat the tea like a cordial. Chilled flavours don't

come through as well as hot flavours, so you need more - that's why ice cream makers use so much flavouring. So you will probably have to brew stronger."

The cordial reference is helpful when looking at one of the year's big launches - new liquid-based iced tea mixes from Sweetbird.

"The very interesting thing is that everyone else in the world sees 'iced tea' as a summer staple, except the UK," says Sweetbird's Paul Maxwell. "It has never been big in the UK, and we just don't know why... so this year we're really going to be pushing it, and we're also going to be pointing out to the trade that the profit margin on a

12oz drink is fantastic - probably 90 per cent on a realistic selling price of £2 or over. And the reason we produce it as a syrup is for consistency - very easy, no danger of stewing."

But, he acknowledges, the concept of 'iced tea' is going to be a hard sell against the big chains and their frappes.

"The preconception of 'iced tea' is that it's going to be a cold builders' tea, and that's what puts people off!"

"So we've gone for a very fruity, herbal look. There is tea in there, but we have to get away from the impression that this drink is of 'a cup of tea, gone cold'. So our point-of-sale material is a big image of ice and lime and jasmine. It looks the kind of drink that people would want, and the impression

we want to achieve is: 'I'd like one of those!'"

Sweetbird's two new flavours are passion fruit lemon and jasmine lime, joining the original peach, raspberry, and a chai designed to be served cold.

A standard 12oz drink takes ice, chilled water and 30ml of the syrup - ideally, a garnish of mint leaves or maybe wedges of lemon or lime support the expected premium price.

Mighty Leaf, another of the pyramid-format tea suppliers, has created a 'Get Set for Summer' deal on its tea collections. The Iced Tea collection offers 15 teas including the Green Tea Tropical, Marrakesh Mint, Organic African Nectar, Orange Dulce and Organic Detox Infusion. There is also a Sangria Collection, offering Mighty Leaf's White Orchard, Organic African Nectar and Chamomile Citrus.

The Get Set for Summer offer can be tested for £9.99 - the offer is one box of the 15-pouch Iced Tea Collection and one box of the 15-pouch Sangria Iced Tea Collection, normally £6.70 each.

Each tea pouch makes a 14oz serving, says Mighty Leaf: "you simply make a double strength brew of tea, using 6oz freshly boiled water instead of 12oz, infuse for the time stated on the tag (three to five minutes depending on variety), remove the pouch and pour over 10oz ice in a large glass."

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Soft drinks is a sector that too many people take too easily – too many cafes rely on the same old major brands, too many of those brands sit back and wait for the business, and even many of the smaller 'artisan' brands are lacking in their approach to the trade.

In all, there is very little practical information from suppliers – they keep telling the trade that their drinks are delicious, tasty, mouth-watering, and the independent producers bang on about being 'traditionally-English' or 'redolent of summers past' and so on... but they very rarely come up with any ideas about the practical selling of the soft drink in a coffee house.

A different attitude comes from Claire Martinsen, who used to be a big brand 'corporate', with Mars, no less. She gave that up to make soft drinks according to her grandmother's recipes, and recently invented what she calls 'posh pop', or 'grown-up pops'.

"Soft drinks seems to have become just too much of a mainstream business," she told us thoughtfully. "All the passion that café operators have for their tea and their coffee is not replicated with their soft drinks – the care and love doesn't follow through.

"Some café owners would never serve Nescafe, but don't look beyond Coke, which is bizarre.

"And none of the big-brand soft drinks are premium drinks.

"By contrast, a barista will sell you a coffee with a story told with care, attention and interest. He does not say 'I get my beans from the cash-and-carry'! So why not move that behaviour to your soft drinks?"

"The stories that can be told around soft drinks will surprise you. I do large volumes in independent pubs, where staff love to talk about their drinks."

The practice is now beginning to happen in cafes, she says.

"I've been impressed by a café which has actually said to me: 'we want a story behind everything we sell'. The owner has actually bothered to go back up the supply chain and ask suppliers for the stories behind their products...



Claire Martinsen

Soft drinks - where's all the passion and the selling stories?

and curiously, the story for us turned out to be that I come from her own town, but it's still a story!"

That café turns out to be the Big Blue in Derby, run by Wendy Thompson.

"One of my aims is to try to know where everything has come from, and to know some history behind it," Wendy told *Coffee House*. "People like stories, and are interested in us being passionate about what we sell.

"I wanted to get away from the mainstream soft drinks, so I went in search

of products made by a little company who could tell me about their experiences in creating their drinks... and believe me, there are not many soft drinks companies like that out there!

"Then I found Breckland Orchard and she told me how she is creating the drinks from her childhood and learned them from being with her grandmother, here in our own town. Now I think that is a real selling point!"

Very few soft drinks makers consider this verbal part of selling – most brands talk hopefully of bottles that look good in the chiller cabinet, and think that is enough. But many coffee houses and tea rooms do not sell from front-of-house chiller cabinets.

"I do have a big chiller, but really the only way to sell them is to talk to customers and encourage them," says Wendy Thompson. "More and more people want to know where their food and drink comes from, so if you can feed them that personal information, you are one step in front of your competitors."

Imaginative suppliers say that there are many good tactics – why not put the newest soft drink on the specials board?

"This is a really good idea," says Claire Martinsen. "Some soft drink companies can be really snooty about

this, the ones that talk about their products as 'wine replacements'! Now, as much as we love them... they're only soft drinks! Put them on the board!

"I am playing around with a limited-edition dandelion and burdock, which is the Marmite of soft drinks – you either love it or you hate it. It was a customer's suggestion, and it turns out to have a geographic preference, because it's much bigger in the north. This is a drink which, in the right place, could go on the specials board."

It has become common for sellers of coffee and tea to match or 'pair' flavours with their food menu - this can now be done with soft drinks. If a customer orders a three-cheese panini on a hot day, the barista should immediately say: 'this juice goes perfectly with that panini...'

"This is a brilliant idea, but nobody has ever really done it," says Claire, and has produced her own suggestions of drinks to be promoted beside food.

Breckland Orchard strawberry and rhubarb pairs well with the afternoon-tea menu, scones with jam and cream, and light salad sandwiches. Her blackcurrant and raspberry works as a soft drink alongside coffee, and her ginger beer with chilli goes with anything chocolate, quiches, omelettes, and ham.

Cloudy lemonade and the new sloe lemonade work with asparagus, blueberry muffins, chicken sandwiches, or goats' cheese dishes.

Such imagination will pay off, says Claire Martinsen.

"The principle applies that you sell it for as much as you can... a coffee shop could price these drinks at anything between £1.75 and £2.75, if they put a good story with it.

"And the great thing about a non-supermarket product is that the value comes from the way it is served – when the customer is served a drink they know perfectly well they can buy themselves in a multi-pack for a couple of pounds, what on earth do you expect they think when you ask them £2 for one glass of it?"

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The profitable use of the cordial – including the nettle flavour!

One of the most imaginative soft drinks companies in the market, James White, has made a new move into the cordial sector. White, the company which invented Big Tom, the adult tomato juice, and pioneered the health benefits of vegetable and beetroot juices to such an extent that they became adopted by international rugby sides, has bought the Thorncroft brand.

"They made the original elderflower cordial," White's Lawrence Mallinson told us. "They became briefly famous when they battled the big French champagne houses over calling the ready-to-drink version 'elderflower champagne', and they won... but finally on appeal they lost!"

"Eventually they lost their prime elderflower slot, and the Thorncroft range is now quite niche and specialist, almost unseen in the supermarkets."

How can cordials best be used in the coffee shop?

"The problem to overcome is that people generally think of cordials as bog-standard supermarket squashes – but the ones that make a profit are the upmarket cordials. Where the operators are looking to serve something unusual, and to keep a cap on their costs, an unusual quality cordial can be useful and show a remarkably good profit.

"If coffee shops serve by the glass, then the economics of the quirky and more expensive cordials are more attractive than any ready-bottled



Thorncroft nettle cordial

drinks. They are very easy to handle, and offer something easily promotable as a 'today's special' – clearly special, but not so wacky as to scare people off.

"The costings are about £2 plus VAT a bottle, making 3.5 litres, or 10-12 servings - so about 20/25p per serving. You can add still or sparkling water.

"They can definitely be used in smoothies, particularly our pink ginger and the Detox which has a distinctive aniseed taste. But the fruit can overwhelm, so a little experimenting is often needed."

The most unusual one for the specials board – but probably not the smoothie – is the Thorncroft nettle cordial.

"Rather infuriatingly, we liked it so much that we finished all the first samples at home!" admits Mallinson. "It does not have that distinctive flowery note of the elderflower. It is surprisingly quite 'wine like', although I am not implying you could pass one off instead of the other... unless a lot of the former had been consumed first!"



It was a busy time for Lavazza's tennis-themed cafes at the Wimbledon tournament. They had sixty cafes onsite – on the first Monday, one of those cafes alone did twenty kilos of coffee; on one wet day, two cafes did 3,800 cups and 150 iced lattes. We have also learned that in the Wimbledon press office (no, we weren't there!) the sports writers went through more coffee in the first two days of the tennis than they did in the entire tournament last year.

A mystery benefactor has helped the Ticked Pink tea rooms in Lavenham, Suffolk – when a bench outside the 500-year-old building was vandalised, an anonymous donor who likes the café promised to buy another one. It is the second time the tea-room has been vandalised – it has a swinging sign, like a pub sign, showing a woman reclining on a sofa. This was damaged by spray paint... and it turned out that the vandal was an old lady who thought it too risqué!

without milk'. Andrew Beales from the tea-room told us: "They decided to go with a blend of English Breakfast (itself a blend) and Nilgiri from southern India".



I Like Trains, an 'alternative rock' band from Leeds, have launched their own brand of tea, having been fed up with unreliable tea on tour. They consulted Lee Rosy's tea room in Nottingham, and were given a pile of samples, which they blended themselves. The new ILTea product is said to be 'a strong blend with a unique taste that is suitable with or

An unusual new coffee brought in by DR Wakefield is Doi Chaang, from Thailand. "Some suppliers say they already have Doi Chaang, but it isn't," says Simon Wakefield. "They have coffee from nearby, not the real thing. This has many characteristics – taste, appearance, and a story behind the coffee." Independent roasters should have samples soon.

Use food matching and mocktails

In theory, soft drinks have two uses in the café trade – they should be served both in the glass and as a takeaway item in the bottle. Sadly, the soft drinks industry in general concentrates very little on the former, and most trade reports and statistics refer to 'grab and go', whereas the café trade is equally interested in 'select and stay'!

What do brands do to support the coffee-house trader who wants to sell soft drinks for consumption in the glass, at the table?

"All our products work just as well when consumed on the premises as on-the-go, so we're keen to help where we can," says the Bottlegreen brand. "In particular, we offer guidance on creating mixed drinks, for example cocktail and mocktail blends.

"While cocktails may not be a viable option for most outlets, mocktails can be more achievable and are relatively easy to put together. As an example,

pour 100ml orange juice and 50ml pineapple juice with 25ml lime cordial in a glass, and stir. Add a few ice cubes and top with water. Add two teaspoons of grenadine syrup, which will sink to the bottom and give the drink a two-tone effect."

Dilutables will work well if promoted, says Bottlegreen. "These are incredibly versatile. One bottle of Bottlegreen cordial makes around 6.5 litres of drink, and with customers generally willing to pay between 50p - £1 for a glass, there is scope for large profit margins."

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In May this year, BB's Coffee and Muffins cleared out its store in the Harlequin Centre in Watford, and re-branded the whole thing, throwing out the old white-on-red logo and bringing in a relatively unusual contemporary colour scheme of pink, white and black.

The design was the work of the man who designed the Sketch restaurant in London – yes, the one where a coffee can be £9 a cup – and it was the first step in re-branding a 70-strong estate.

To a degree, it is a surprise that the estate exists to be re-branded at all – because BB's had already made a loss of £1.5 million in 2008, and was projected to make a loss of another million the following year, when it went into administration.

The chain of 37 company-owned and 111 franchised stores was 'scaled back' to around seventy, and around 40 franchisees left the group to trade independently, most notably Shashi Patel, who took over the 13 stores he operated as a franchisee in the north of England and turned them into his own Love Coffee chain. A couple of dozen stores were closed for good.

And then a consortium appeared of previous BB's directors to buy the rest out of administration. As their managing director, they hired someone who had been with BB's before - Andrew Moyes, whose CV includes the notable phrase 'turnround specialist', and who had left in 2004, when the chain was still moving upwards.

"As operations and marketing director, I had already turned BB's round

The return of the



Just a couple of years ago, BB's Coffee and Muffins was a rising star of the coffee-chain sector – and then fell dramatically. It is back, with a full redesign... and a former director is in the turnround seat

once, which is why it was an interesting experience to be invited to come back and do it again! But when I came back, I knew the network, and a lot of the same people were still there.

"Yes, the first time, it was going upwards, the whole coffee explosion was going up, and we had a very strong foothold in shopping centres in

the days when landlords managed the mix of shopping centres better than they do now. Some of them are now desperate... both the landlords and the sites."

Why did BB's hit trouble?

"There were three or four elements. The product offer hadn't moved on, and the management had taken on top-of-the-market sites at over-the-top rents. The ambience of the stores had not changed, although people now wanted more soft seating and less over-bright lighting.

"There had been no investment, and a place gets shabby if you don't keep redecorating. The stakes had been upped across all the chains, and the customers do notice these things.

"A huge choice of options had developed, and while Costa and Starbucks hadn't got into the shopping centres, BB's had taken its eye off the ball, didn't make hay, and weren't sufficiently self-critical."

And yet, the Irish sites remained profitable.

"They had very strong sites, and were first into prime shopping sites which were more upmarket than the UK. A lot of UK shopping centres have become very shabby - there was one site where we had only two other shops still operating on the same floor as us! We have found ourselves trying to cover some very downmarket sites, and some very upmarket ones, at the same time."

Why was BB's worth rescuing? Why did the former directors come back? Why did Andrew Moyes come back?

"I always felt that with the right management, BB's could be sorted out. The first BB's turnround job the first

time round was a root-and-branch job – the logo and the branding were very mom-and-pop, so it was an entire overhaul, from changing small torpedoes to baguettes, and new coffee beans.

"But the main quality of BB's right back at the start was the USP of fresh muffins, every day - nothing was kept overnight for the next day. We still do that - if there are any left, they may be given away, and I suspect we contribute a lot to the correct stocky look of overnight security guards!"

The new turnround has a wider remit. There has been talk of 'broadening the demographic', and of taking the brand out of the shopping malls and into the high streets. This is why the new look came in.

"We were always strong with the 'grey pound', but we needed the younger people in, and we've succeeded in that.

"Our re-brand is very different from what we had before. We were still in the burgundy-and-cream design era, which wasn't a young enough look, and there are still a lot of operators using 'coffee colours'. When Costa really own the colour, you have to do something to stand out against it... and also, I didn't quite get the Starbucks 'new look', because it didn't feel radically different to me, and it was still the green-and-brown hues again.



Andrew Moyes at the Watford opening

"So we used the designer who worked on Sketch and now this is not just another coffee shop.

"We had a huge campaign of 100,000 mailouts, which drew a very strong response. We gave away 3,000 muffins, and those people came back to buy more, but what we did notice was that people who were about to walk past the rebranded site were seen to stop and turn back to have another look.

"In Watford, we have now seen sales up over fifty per cent since the re-brand. As we have Starbucks, Costa and others very close, we're very happy with that uplift."

Reports of BB's moving more into the high street turn out to be true, even if the chain will keep its main base in shopping malls

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For the first time, technology has been used in the critical problem of obtaining the correct milk texture for a perfect latte or cappuccino.

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muffin men

The COFFEE HOUSE interview



"When it's hot, customers don't go to shopping centres - they go to the high street. And when it's wet, they go into the centres.

"The next site will be Cardiff, which is a shopping centre as well, but now we have the right branding for the high street after that."

Will it be welcomed in a retail sector already overcrowded with coffee shops?

"It's true that the number of coffee shops is ridiculous in some places, and we're all sharing too much business in a recessionary period.

"Will BB's be more acceptable to the provincial high street? In a Costa, you could be in Giggleswick or Aberdeen. With ours, it will not be ubiquitous, we'll be different, so we think we'll be seen as more allied to the independents than to the mega-brands."

The food and coffee offer has changed slightly - while BB's believes in generous portion sizes, some are down. So are the coffee sizes.

"In the past, BB's became a stronger food offer than any of the other coffee operations, and with larger portions. These still are - one of our paninis is worth two of what you get in some chains.

"Now, research says people want more 'premium' muffins, but not so large, so we're 15 per cent smaller, but with more different toppings.

"We've done a lot of work on the coffee, which is roasted by Coburg, and we are now on smaller sizes, because our customers do not want monstrous coffees. We had the entire Watford staff in for three-day barista training, and we're now on 8oz and 12oz drinks, with the flat white served at 8oz. There's even a signature ristretto.

"Previously, we always had six-weekly promotional changes. Was that a bit steep? No, a lot of people came in very regularly, and so you have to keep it interesting for them.

"That proved successful, and is still strong for us now. We'll soon be having a big promotion on toasted wraps and soups, and in the New Year we'll get into healthy eating. We have a muffin of the month - our Wimbledon promotion was a strawberry-and-cream muffin, with fresh strawberries, linked with a strawberry smoothie."

There will still be room for new franchises, says Andrew Moyes. Three-quarters of the BB's stores are franchised, the rest company-run. There is still a large number of people wanting to get into the coffee-house business by franchise, but some companies are now stricter on their franchise criteria.

"Where franchising struggled was with people who over-borrowed. We now tend to expand with existing franchisees - there are still good rent deals to be had, and a lot of our franchisees are still hungry to take on more shops.

"We learn a lot from franchisees, particularly on matters of pricing and recipes. It's often a case of 'look, we've tried this muffin topping, try it in the other sites'."

Oddly, Andrew Moyes can take ideas from another café business - he part-owns the Azuza chain of three sites in

Marlborough, Hungerford and Bristol, which he set up after leaving BB's the first time. His espresso there is the Tudor Rainforest Alliance Amazonian blend which won a Great Taste award last year, and makes great play of that on menus.

"Does Azuza learn anything from BB's? No, I think there has been more that BB's has learned from Azuza than the other way round!

"Having been a 'corporate' person with M&S and Shell, creating an independent was a really tough call for me. When you have to grasp everything from marketing to crockery, it gives you a much more useful understanding of working a coffee house at grass-roots level."



Disembodied arms rise triumphantly as part of the BB's decor... no, we didn't know why, so we asked the designer. He said: "The BB's tag line is 'what's your muffin moment...because any excuse will do'. In a playful way, we cite examples of 'moments' when a reward of a muffin is 'allowed'. It is about giving the customer a reason to indulge in a delicious muffin. The wooden hands outstretched represent that choice."

TightVac UK



A new retail storage solution for wholebean coffee

More coffee shops are now stocking a choice of roasted bean instead of just one house blend - and more coffee shops need a way of displaying these beans.

The TightVac is an easy-to-handle, secure container which takes account of the need for de-gassing. It is the American solution to a number of problems - an easy, uniform way of storing beans in the shop, a practical way of displaying the varieties on offer, and also a useful consumer sale. The customers can be sold the containers, which they can return for refills of freshly-ground coffee when they run out. The TightVac is already being used in all these ways in the British deli trade.

There are containers which are clear, for maximum display, and there are containers which are deliberately opaque, for the protection of the contents against sunlight. Other colours in the range are designed to minimise the light yet have a very good aesthetic appeal.



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A café-food company said in our last issue that 'nobody has yet defined the coffee-house food offer', and this applies equally to the coffee-house snack offer. The interesting thing is that coffee-house owners now appear to be buying their snacks imaginatively.

Coffee house owners are doing what snack-makers do - they are watching trends, and following them.

"We are clearly winning new customers because of this," says Simon Law of the Handmade Cake Company.

"Just like any cafe owner would do, we look in every other café window for ideas... and although you do look at the Starbucks cake on a stick and you wonder if it will work, you know that if something works in Marks and Spencer, which has tentacles which reach across the world, then you are well advised to take it seriously."

Major trends in snacks currently involve the good and the bad, says Simon Law - one very unhelpful trend, as in coffee itself, is a sharp rise in the price of ingredients.

"We will not see cheap food come back for some time.

"A lot has been written about sugar prices, but really, everything bar eggs is going up stratospherically. Cocoa has come back a bit, but coconut has doubled. Edible oil has increased. Butter by the tonne has doubled, and that is our biggest ingredient... although strangely, in a Victoria sponge, margarine is actually better, because butter can be too rich, and can mask the purity of the flavour. Marge works chemically in the right way... but that's gone up, too!"

There are various trends which have been spoken of in the snack business. One, usefully for his own company, is the suggestion that consumers prefer cakes which look 'handmade'.

"The difficulty is 'what does hand-made mean?' We've seen a big trend towards products described this way, and it is misleading - for many of them, we suggest that 'handmade' means that a palette knife was wafted somewhere near the product!"



One of the most curious arrivals in the coffee house sector has been the Starbucks cake-on-a-stick, the Cake Pop. The brand claims that this 'solves the everlasting question of how to make cake portable', and it has been an American trend in speciality bakery shops for some time. The problems in mass manufacture are partly the detailing, and partly keeping the cake on the stick. According to Starbucks, double-dipping the stick in chocolate acted as a kind of adhesive.

What's moving in bakery?

Are fashions and fads worth following in the bakery sector? There are some helpful trends... and some unhelpful ones

"We ourselves get challenged on this, because of our name, so we always explain how our cakes are made, and ninety-nine people in a hundred accept it. Occasionally there's the hundredth who says 'you can't use electric mixers', and then it all gets a bit silly. I do have trouble imagining a bakery full of ladies with wooden spoons and mixing bowls, much as the rustic idea appeals!"

"But here, finishing is always manually done. Icing is always done by hand - chocolate is poured by hand over the back of a spoon, it's that basic."



The trick is to produce 'healthy' items which taste good

- Simon Law

One much-touted trend has been 'health and wellbeing' - but is it actually possible to legitimately promote a cake or biscuit as 'healthy'? This too can be mistaken, says Simon Law.

"The big health trend through the café trade is the number of people asking for 'gluten-free', although they actually mean 'without wheat flour'."

Why is 'gluten-free' the wrong term?

"The biggest source of gluten in a cake is wheat. It makes some people feel bloated and uncomfortable, but these people are not all coeliacs (those sensitive to gluten). Coeliacs are an incredibly small number of people, but the bloated feeling affects average people, and the shorthand for it has become 'gluten-free'."

"There is a lack of sweet bakery products without wheat flour. We said years ago it was too difficult - we came round, and we have now launched a wheat-free product using rice-flour, and it has gone down well."

The trick, says Simon Law, is to produce 'healthy' items which taste good - the awful memory of the old 'diabetic chocolate' lives on for many people, and the idea that food for people with sensitivities has to give something in taste is not now acceptable.

"The key driver is to produce something that the average person, you and me, will be happy to eat."

Other fashions in snacks can be tricky.

"Customers are very conservative. They may well walk into a café and say 'that looks interesting', but then they'll choose another piece of carrot cake! They do not take chances - they want to know they will like something."

So the standard items are essential, but a fad can still turn out to be a hit.

We've had the cupcake fashion, and the next one was expected to be the 'whoopie cake', a kind of sponge sandwich. They are an American invention, and in typical American fashion, the state of Maine even considered this year making the whoopie the 'official state dessert'. In the UK, they haven't noticeably taken off.

"Yes, we're still waiting for the whoopie cake to happen!" laughs Simon Law. "What goes against it is the clamshell look, which doesn't allow you to see exactly what you're buying. With a cupcake, you know it's going to be sponge, its design is all on top, and when they're done properly, they're spectacular. When they're done badly, as with one of the biggest coffee-shop chains, they're horrid."

"We did get it right with cupcakes. That market is still doing well, and still going up - last year we sold £400,000 of cupcakes to the trade, which is probably over a million pounds at selling price. These were all iced by hand, with ladies using icing bags - yes, this is a legitimate 'hand-made' skill. The fact that they do it so well, and so quickly, is stunning."

"The guiding principle remains - think, what do people want in a café?"

Whatever your decision, says Simon Law, promote it. Don't wait hopefully for people to choose a snack or cake. Use active promotion such as 'this is today's terrific carrot cake, get it now while there's still some left!'

"There is certainly a big problem for coffee house chains in this. The one that does it best is probably Costa... with some, the food offer is just 'there if you want it'. Snacks are impulse buys, and should tempt you when you pay for your coffee - so they should be promoted, and should be merchandised."

The Handmade Cake Company is a supplier with extremely firm opinions on this. No excuses for that, says Simon Law.

"It's when a supplier does not have firm opinions on his product or his market, that I think the trade customer, the coffee-shop owner, should get very worried!"

Cookies on the specials board?

The company which has most enthusiastically promoted the concept of the 'cookie' in recent years has been Beyond the Bean. The experience of marketing the Byron Bay Cookie in limited-edition form has left the brand convinced that cookies can be a legitimate specials-board item.

"The strawberry and clotted cream cookies were developed for the UK and involved a 75-strong taste panel," says Paul Maxwell. "We look at taste trends in other markets and think: 'what will work here'; we put a lot of thought behind what is going to sell, and we launched the strawberry when we were very sure it would work - and we had it in some cafes at Wimbledon last year."

"The white chocolate and cranberry was always intended as an October-December seasonal cookie, and during that period, it sold more than some of our standard range."

When you get something that clicks, the key is to use it - and there are now cases of tea-shops selling the strawberry and cream cookie and a pot of tea, priced together as one item.

"I too see no reason why a cookie can't get a place on the specials board," says Paul Maxwell challengingly. "This is why we created the limited-edition cookie, and it's a strategy that works in many different markets. You think of what you want to sell beside your summer drinks, and what you want to sell beside your winter drinks."

"To regularly have something new



gives the customer a reason to come back. A 'special' is an inexpensive way of getting attention, it avoids the problem of losing customers because the café down the road has freshened up its offer, and it is also a good way of justifying a premium price.

"For cookies, we now have two offers, the single-wrapped cookie and the one in the jar with the serving tongs. The majority of sales are from the jar, but there will always be a market for single-portion sales from mobile carts and cafes which do not have seating areas."

"If you are trying to actively encourage the customer, then display the treats upfront. It is the sight of our jars and tongs, actively displayed, which conveys the message: 'you know you want one...!'"

Byron Bay has now developed the gluten-free version of the strawberry and clotted cream cookie, approved by Coeliac UK and the Vegetarian Society.

The muffin market has matured, and did so some time ago – it is seven-teen years since they made an impact in supermarkets, and eleven years since one of the first major brands made their big push on muffins with an ad which is still too risqué for us to reprint here!

And yet, there has been very little market research available. Coffee house owners can see the things selling with their own eyes, but 'research' is restricted to such anecdotal views as, from two companies recently, 'muffins are far from reaching the end of their product lifecycle' and 'the muffin market is moving quicker than ever'.

But now, one company has been doing research into the market - it is Dawn, the giant multinational, and marketing manager Jacqui Passmore has told Coffee House that she is sharing the results with the trade.

"We now see that muffins have become a 'staple', a totally acceptable part of our diet, and so we have been doing consumer research on the subject of 'sweet bakery'.

"We held in-depth focus groups, which were three-hour sessions, getting into the psyche of the buyer - the why and what and where of how they buy these things. We also did a lot of on-the-street research: why did you buy that, and where? We even asked, if they could design their own bakery product, what would it be... and the results are already in development.

"In many cases, our trade customers don't have access to this kind of research, so now we find we can be suggesting completely new ideas to the trade."

There is a certain amount of adventurous buying by consumers, she has found - and the muffin does lend itself to experimentation. (By contrast, notes Jacqui Passmore, there is only so much you can do with a brownie).

How much choice can a café realistically give a customer? Specialist cafés have actually spoken of promoting 28 varieties of muffin!

"That may be a little extreme, but there certainly have been a lot of questions from the trade over the right range and choice of muffins. So we asked the consumers.

"When it came to flavour, the preference for chocolate was much higher than I had expected.

"There are different elements to chocolate, but as a basic ingredient it is always going to be very important in muffins.

"The words consumers used most for what they wanted in muffins were 'chocolatey' and 'creamy'... and they also used 'indulgent', which was one that consumers used a lot. They do want to 'indulge'.

"What is also happening is that people are becoming more adventurous - they are interested in different flavour combinations and textures, even the ones you never thought would work... I wouldn't touch chocolate and chilli at

Knowing what the snack customer wants

Does anybody really know what the snack customer wants? Oh yes, we do, says Dawn...



first, but it turns out to taste very pleasant! However, chocolate and fruit allow for no end of combinations in muffins."

In that case, what is the right size, quality and pricing for a muffin? Another company has been quoted elsewhere as saying: 'research tells us that consumers would rather pay more for a great tasting, quality muffin than buy two cheaper muffins that don't deliver on flavour and taste'. More to this than meets the eye, says Dawn.

"Size is something that depends on occasion and time - muffins are not a 'one size fits all' product. The ideal weight is probably 100gm, before icing and topping, but now there is also a trend for miniaturisation, and the smaller muffins at about 50gm do tend to give a greater explosion of flavour.

"It is quite possible, and we are exploring this, that people will buy several of the smaller muffins as opposed to one of the larger. They probably don't feel as guilty. This means that perhaps we should look at packing smaller muffins in pairs.

"There is also a move towards 'sharing', which really means the occasion of two people having an afternoon coffee together. This is where the 'occasion' comes in, and again it makes us think of offering a pair of muffins in a pack.

"It makes a lot of sense for the coffee shop owner to think of the muffin as more than one thing... to think about the sizes, and the situation of the sale."

This reflects on pricing as well. And there are interesting guidelines from other bakery sectors, says Dawn.

"The pricing is in relation to the 'indulgence' of the product - the more indulgent, the more you move up, but there will be a limit. There is a vast range of prices in the market, and in

the branded coffee shops, a muffin will be £1.75 - £1.85. In another retailer, it may be four for £1.19, but there will obviously be a quality difference! I would have thought going beyond £1.99 for a muffin would hit a psychological barrier.

"However, in cakes, the larger slices are fetching £3-£4 a slice! Places like garden centres, working on a 'home-made' style, will sell like this, and our focus groups said yes, they were prepared to pay it."

To what degree has that 'home-made' appearance of the muffin become more important?

"The consumer these days is well aware of what they want a product to look like, and their appreciation of detail is now staggering. They do not want to see a manufacturer's plastic covering on a cake, as this is deemed to give the impression of being 'factory produced'.

"They want the artisanal look - even if they do suspect the things were made elsewhere!

"In the muffin market, the 'tulip' muffins are regarded to have the right 'artisanal' feel - these are slightly more

vertical, and sit inside a kind of 'cup' wrapping. The 'mushroom' design is the one that consumers actually want to eat... it's easier for them to peel the topping off."

A muffin is both a sit-down and an on-the-go product, says Dawn, and both can be actively promoted.

"Once these things are baked, defrosted, or whatever, they have a finite shelf life, so it is in the operator's interest to promote them well and get them moving quickly, and we can see that muffins are made very prominent in some of the big chains."

There are many aspects of muffins which lend themselves to front-of-counter promotion, says Dawn.

"There is definitely an aspect of seasonality which works. There is no reason why you can't have a collection of seasonal muffins - for Hallowe'en, you get the effect with orange frosting and chocolate flakes.

"We work on this a lot, and for the pre-Christmas muffins, it makes sense for the operator to get in touch with us early and say 'what have you got?'

"It's a good idea to ask us - there is no end of ideas!"



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Bakery snacks in the coffee house is one thing - hot food is quite another, not least because it potentially changes a café's entire status.

Starbucks has discovered the bacon buttie, although it calls it 'an all-day breakfast panini', and the Mirror complained that at £2.85, is a third more than Greggs customers pay for a bacon bap and a hot drink. Generously, Starbucks says: 'why not add ketchup or brown sauce?' However, Starbucks was said to have tested 12,000 rashers as part of their research!

Starbucks has also brought in a full breakfast menu, offering porridge, yoghurt with a choice of toppings, and buttermilk pancakes.

The Boston Tea Party coffee house chain, operating in the general Bristol area, has just brought out its new seasonal menu. Be imaginative but realistic, says Melanie Roberts.

"We call ourselves a café-restaurant as the depth of our offer goes way beyond that of a typical coffee house - all day breakfast menu, the usual sandwiches, cakes, panini etc as the traditional café offer, but also special main meals and a kids menu to focus on the families. The new menu is trialled extensively in-house, but the real trial is when it actually goes on the menu - if it doesn't sell it doesn't stay on the menu. We often put something on the menu that we think is brilliant but it just doesn't resonate with the customers, so off it comes."

The chain has recently added the Boston Veggie Breakfast Stack, described as 'better than a full English', which is Lyonnaise potatoes topped with thyme butter, baked Portobello mushroom, roasted cherry tomatoes and a poached egg for £6.50 (£5.95 for the vegan 'no egg' option). The new Fish & Chip Sandwich is actually home-made fish fingers served in a sandwich with chunky tartare sauce and served with sweet potato chips and ketchup for £5.95.

A real curiosity on the menu is 'specialist teas creatively crossed with jelly - a taste sensation'. These are classic jellies infused with various aromatics and loose-leaf teas. Currently the chain is using a berry tea or an Earl Grey; the result is served in pots at £1.75.

The problem is of a café's kitchen equipment and manpower, and whether it can cope with hot food in the conventional way, suggests Jonathan Ashmore of the Big Kitchen.

"If the answer is 'no', this doesn't mean hot food is impossible. We have a pre-cooked meat range - food can be prepared by staff with limited cooking skills, it reduces the amount of kitchen space and equipment needed, and it is quicker in rush periods."

The pre-cooked range includes pork, regional and gourmet sausages, pork and beef meatballs, lamb kofta and chicken satay. The products are all fully cooked, then frozen, and just

When the going gets hot...

Turning a coffee shop into a full-service dining place is a tricky thing to do... but there are ways of serving hot snacks without a big kitchen



This is a Tasca - not unlike a wrap, but a 'bread pocket' that can be sold hot or cold.

Below - the Wrapid wrap



need to be re-heated and used as the main aspect of a dish, leaving the café owner to add their own accompaniments and frills.

Remember that customers' needs change, says Raphael Jeannot of SSP. A changing menu is crucial to keep regular customers interested. Portability is important, so consider how any item can be eaten on the go, and think about the packaging for it... exactly how would you package items such as Ritazza's current takeaways, roasted pepper and goat cheese focaccia, chicken parmesan salad ciabatta; turkey, sun-blushed tomato and mozzarella mezzaluna; or cheese and tomato basil croissant?

You pack them in the 'bread', comes the answer from wraps and tascas.

Wraps, it is claimed, have grown strongly in the last year, and one figure suggests that they now sell twice as many as paninis, which sounds strange.

However, says Andrew Pocock, managing director of Impress Sandwiches, cafes without full kitchen facilities can still win worthwhile business with wraps as hand-held food which can be prepared easily. Hot ones can go in a panini grill.

They are seen as healthier than the traditional sandwich, he says, and a good range is achievable from relatively few ingredients. The breakfast wrap

in his Wrapid range is egg, sweetcure bacon, Lincolnshire sausage, sliced mushrooms, cheese and tomato ketchup - it is hand-wrapped in a tomato tortilla.

The products are supplied chilled, and the maker observes that if you pick the right ingredients, you get a more helpful shelf life - no lettuce to go soggy, not too wet a sauce. A tortilla, being 'not bread' and with no cut edges, tends to last longer.

The operator might expect to pay around £1.10, and the items have been seen on sale at up to £3.25. The maker says that Sheffield University has recently managed to sell 6,000 of them in one term.

A slightly unusual variant is the Tasca, which is available from La Pizza. These are fully baked, folded, soft bread 'pockets', and are promoted as 'thaw, fill and serve, hot or cold'.

Managing director Richard Jansen says that their value in the coffee house is down to speed and operational convenience - they can be thawed in small batches, are softer to eat than a panini, will hold more or less anything securely, and although the idea is to be an alternative sandwich 'carrier', they work very well as a hot snack, given perhaps 90 seconds in the panini grill.

The filling is said to be more secure than in a panini because the shape creates a 'pocket' which will not split or break.

The basic 'pockets' are probably bought at around 26p each. Filled tascas have been seen sold hot at anything up to £3.99.

The Lotus position



One of the trickiest snack sectors in the coffee-house trade is the giveaway. This is the item traditionally served on the saucer beside a coffee - you really have to offer something, or be thought a cheapskate, and recent arguments have centred on how imaginative these things should be, and how much the café owner should invest in them... because they bring no return by themselves, except for goodwill.

The traditional giveaway was always the caramelised biscuit, and Lotus, being the major name in the sector, is the target for everyone else who enters the giveaway-biscuit sector. Their easy first line is to take a swipe at 'the tired old caramelised biscuit...'

(Earlier this year, the Lotus patent on the caramelised biscuit was revoked by the Belgian courts; Lotus decided not to appeal, largely on the basis that the taste was considered unique, and that the brand's position was too powerful for the patent to matter).

Is the product still important to the café sector?

Last year, Lotus tried an unusual tactic of jokey messages on biscuit wrappers - this will come back this autumn, and be more heavily used next year.

Curiously, says Lotus, their biscuits can be retailed as an add-on sale.

"We already have a very successful retail pack with listings in all the top supermarkets," says Frances Booth of Lotus, "and we are looking to step up our focus on twinpacks in coffee shops. We know from calls to our customer care line that consumers are frustrated that they can't buy our biscuits - many say they ask for extra ones to take home in coffee shops where the staff look friendly!"

The Lotus impulse-buy twinpack should retail at around 70-80p.

Dunkability is the Spanish way

At this year's Caffe Culture show, one importer showed a kind of biscuit from Spain - the maker sells it all over the world, but had never tried to crack the British market before, thinking it too hard. It is the Elgorriaga, a kind of sandwich, with chocolate between two biscuit layers.

"We are now selling it to independent cafes all over London," says importer Andrew Seymour. "I haven't had any rejection from the independent operators. The majority of them display the little two-biscuit packs in a basket on the counter, and I've seen them selling for 70p - the RRP is only about 45p!"

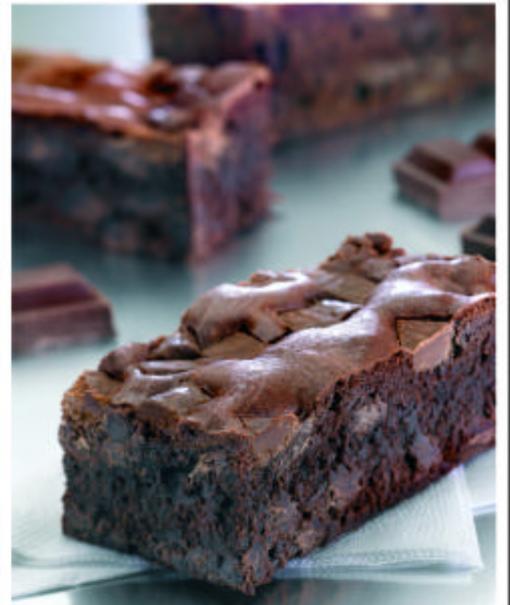
"I have seen the four-pack, for which the cost price is about 39p, selling for a pound, so this is a very good margin product."

An unexpected feature of the biscuit



is its 'dunkability', and this is even recommended by the bakers in Spain.

"Dunking is a funny culture," says Seymour. "People don't do it in public - but this biscuit melts to just the right degree, and the people at the factory tell me they must be dunked!"



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We have written many times, in many magazines, of the standard of coffee in hotels... so you can imagine the feelings with which *Coffee House* found itself in Jersey recently, and saw that the breakfast coffee was a jug on a hotplate. Hesitantly, we tasted it.

It was sublime – the most perfect breakfast coffee. And so was the next cup.

Then the staff refilled the jug, and the standard changed... acceptable, but nothing special. And that's how it stayed for several days.

How come the difference? We tracked down the roaster – it was David Warr, whose roastery is at the back of a delightfully traditional coffee retail shop in a narrow street in St Helier. He also operates an instore coffee-house in a nearby shopping tower, which he uses as an experimental lab for client tastings, and took up our question enthusiastically.

"Why does coffee vary, even on the same site? I think the answer is in tiny detail - when did the caterer last flush the machine, are they serving the first jug of the day, with well-oxygenated water, or is it stale water? How high have they filled the jug - and indeed, have their staff been taught that such precision actually makes a difference?"

"An interesting trend is in measures and doses. I recently lost an account by being a half-penny per cup out - I decided to investigate, and found that the difference was because I was delivering a 60gm measure, and I lost to someone who was putting in 50gm. So I investigated further into the doses being used in hospitality, and the worst we saw was a big company, a very well-known name, which was putting only 28gm of coffee for a three-pint jug... I was staggered!"

"So, I did some blind-tasting with a new client. I used an 80gm measure, and I expected him to agree that the taste was superior. Then I discovered that he wasn't comparing coffees by taste - he was comparing the price per case, irrespective of the dosages!"

There are more hazards at the brewing end.

"Catering clients are using old machines, and grinders which are shot to pieces, and they blame the roaster for the result. A client told me that he went round all his cafes, and the coffee in none of them tasted the same. He said 'David, it must be your fault!' I told him to go round again, and see which site made the best coffee, and study exactly how it was made. Then get all his sites to follow exactly that process.

"I think it is time that we saw some commitment back from the client. Use your roaster's expertise, but have the faith and the courage to match it with your own work - you strive as well! There's no point in one half of the trade working for excellence if the other half isn't."

Caterers and coffee-houses have to appreciate that effort is needed right

The island brew



At Cooper's of Jersey, a safety style of roasting is to 'blend for mis-use' – that is, to produce good coffees with a forgiving nature in the knowledge that they may end up being brewed badly.

up to the point where the brew is delivered into the cup.

"The coffee trade keeps going on about treating coffee like wine, but we have to understand what the practical parallel is. It is that the wine producer has done all the work when they put it in the bottle, and all the caterer has to do is open it... and that's why Nespresso can claim consistency in coffee. They've done all the work!"

David Warr has followed this line of thinking further. His coffee bar in a nearby department store, which he only opened when he was sure he would not compete with any nearby catering clients, doubles as a demonstration site.

"When we introduced an espresso machine into our retail shop, we found ourselves in the situation where individual customers began to say - can I try that? Can I try the medium roast instead of the dark roast? What's the 'seasonal' coffee at the moment? And the girls in the shop responded wonderfully to this.

"But we have trouble getting this over to foodservice clients, so we treated our café as a kind of laboratory. We installed a La Marzocco, Mahlkoenig grinders, and a Uber boiler, and I like this set-up because I can get very precise temperatures on both my filter and my espresso, and with the La Marzocco paddle machine, I get a very steady water flow.

"So now we invite chefs and hoteliers in, and we tell them we're going to show them where coffee is at, right now!"

Why?

"Because the problem we all live with is that we put great coffee into a foodservice environment, and they screw it up. Eventually I realised that I can supply the best coffee in the world, but if the caterer messes it up by abusing it, I'm not really helping anyone.

"It frustrates the hell out of me, but we have decided that one thing we have to do is try and expand their knowledge, while understanding the situation of the catering client. You must always do this - you must realise that their staff may be pulling pints one moment and an espresso the next.

"A problem here is that the specialist end of the coffee market does seem to have disappeared up its own backside. Now, I love my coffee, but there are things I just can't expect of my foodservice clients - we may think of coffee like wine, but they don't... I love grind-on-demand, but I can't expect every

restaurant client to get excited about it!

"I castigated the American speciality coffee association for this, and told one of their conferences that they were getting away from the real world of how people are brewing - now the speciality industry thinks 'David's lost the plot', but this is what I see in the real world.

"So I've gone away from recommending what are theoretically the better coffees, and I have turned towards thinking about what is happening to it. I am thinking backwards from the point of the possibility of the client's staff abusing it."

And so he invites clients to taste and test the very best, but does not expect perfection from the catering end. In some cases, he blends for expected mis-use.

"One thing we do is to blend to allow a little 'wobble-room', a little forgiveness at the brewing end. This is something the big brands have done very well, in that they produce products which are forgiving, and can stand mistreatment by various kinds of staff.

"In this, we are not a typical coffee roaster - we do tend to work against accepted wisdom, and we use techniques such as starting with the roaster cold, which gives a very interesting result!"

As a coffee centre, Jersey remains largely untouched by the chain names. David Warr is president of the local chamber of commerce, and watches would-be developers closely.

"We get all the big brands and their aunties wanting to come into Jersey, and what they don't realise is, this is not the UK. So far, the chamber of commerce has done a pretty good job of stopping over-development, and I really hope we won't become a UK 'clone town' place - there is one development company which believes we should bring the big names in, but we are still at the stage where we can make the decision to keep our identity.

"For many UK towns, it's already too late."



Boughton's Coffee House

is published
by Ian Boughton and Trudi Roark
from

11 Lansdowne Road, Falmouth,
TR11 4BE
Tel: 01326-311339
Mob: 0702 348866

ianb@coffee-house.org.uk
The news website is www.coffee-house.org.uk
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Barriers – get the council on your side first!

It is almost certain that one of the big subjects in the forthcoming review of 'the national high street' will be the use of cafe barriers and awnings on public walkways.

This gets many operators in trouble with local authorities - there is no end to complaints about coffee houses allegedly encroaching on pavements and walkways. And yet, street furniture can make such a contribution to the much-vaunted 'café culture' theme that so many towns are supposed to want, that café owners would do well to use them as a positive when negotiating with councils.

"This is a booming, changing marketplace," says Tony Reynolds, founder of Shading by Design. "At the very beginning of umbrellas and awnings, a barrier of any kind was a low-priority item. As the smoking laws came in, barriers became a priority as windbreaks, and then became an advertising medium."

What is the café operator's course of action to make absolutely sure that his plans for using an external area will not get him into trouble?

"This is a difficult subject to be precise about. In designing an outside scheme, you have to consider the movement of people, so most people who want to work on a pavement need permission, and a licence. It is almost certainly the case that many cafes put these things out without permission, and when you get to an awning and an umbrella, many local authorities begin to think in terms of 'building works'!"

Councils themselves have been criticised for their mixed attitudes. In some cases, the same cafes have had permissions granted and refused by different parts of the same council. Many council policies are said to be illogical, written without expert consultation or input from retailers and resulting in strange rulings on height and other issues.

"There are two schools of thought in councils. One is to encourage the café culture, the other is to say they already have too many street cafes. My own feeling is that there are currently more in the 'café culture' camp than on the Luddite side!

"So the main advice is this – consider your plan in the context of the whole street scene, not just what's in your head. Look at what's going on around you, and think your plan through in terms of the surrounding area.

"This will increase your chances of arguing that what you want to do will enhance the area, and that will enhance your chances of permission."

It works, says Reynolds – he has experience of many sites in which the council and police were actively invited to have their say at an early stage – and as a result, approved everything.

Let the table do the talking

The creative use of café design continues to expand. It is now several years since Lloyd Keisner began advocating to café owners that they had a money-making opportunity in front of them, by selling advertising on their table tops – over a thousand coffee shops in the UK have taken his idea up, and his Tabletalk Media company now calls itself 'the self-appointed spokesman of ambient media'.

Ambient media essentially means using any available surface on which the customer's eye might land, as the platform for a message. Frequent examples are the backs of receipts, and the handles of supermarket trolleys.

"It is not difficult to put messages on many platforms," acknowledges Lloyd Keisner. "But this too often gets into the 'intrusive and annoying' category. We judge advertisements on two key criteria - will it allow us to deliver a compelling but succinct message from a brand, and does it allow us to do this at a moment when the audience is receptive to that message?"

"This led some time ago to a mantra, which is now our external strapline – 'powerful messages at powerful moments'. Sorry if that sounds a little cheesy, but a fundamental part of our success has come from not wallpapering the world with irrelevance!

"We know exactly what we're doing!"

There are always opportunities for coffee shops, he says. The key is in being able to think them through completely, for which the busy operator doesn't have time.

"One very recent example is wi-fi. Many consumers now take it for granted that places of high dwell time will offer free wi-fi, but we know that many proprietors have not considered this. So, we have just completed a huge project offering to install and pay for wi-fi in coffee shops... we in turn will arrange for a major brand to sponsor the home page. This creates the win-win situation for the coffee shop and our brand partner, the advertiser."

Where else can a message be placed on the structure of a coffee shop?

"Opportunities are limitless, but have to be applied with care. We still see the table as the key medium, and our Tablewrap is a method of converting a surface top into a promotional medium, displaying high-quality images."

Never forget the value of repetition. An image seen on an A-board outside, if then seen also on a table top or a menu inside, is retained by the customer.

"The problem with A-boards is that no-one stops and looks - they glimpse it and pop in. But they are reacting very tactically to the message! So, an A-board may highlight something, but it is the longer and deeper opportunities to communicate inside that we are really after."

Coffee Republic is a big Tabletalk partner, but so are many independents.

"We've just finished a big VISA campaign with them, but we have deliber-



A Lufthansa ad table in a Coffee Republic site

ately built up our independent estate. Across a thousand coffee shops and



Lloyd Keisner

1,500 sandwich shops, we have several thousand table installations, and tens of millions of branded coffee sleeves and sandwich bags.

"Others brand sleeves and bags, but no-one else independently produces such volumes combined with A-list brands, and the Tablewrap."

The general deal is that the café owner makes no investment, but receives a percentage of the fee paid by the advertiser. There is more, says Lloyd Keisner

"In all instances, in addition to receiving revenue for Tablewrap, the retailer can receive free sleeves, bags and sometimes cups. This makes quite a saving from the running costs of a coffee shop."

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No Brits in the world tea championships!

Embarrassing though it may be, the Americans have beaten the world to the concept of a barista-type contest for tea. The World Tea Expo, at the end of June, featured the snappily-titled Tea Infusionist Champion challenge - and no Brits were involved at all.

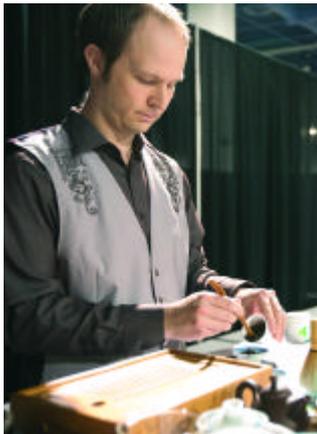
The contest itself is rather similar to the coffee trade's recently-launched Brewer's Cup, in which contestants cannot choose what they are going to brew, but are handed it 'blind' - in this case, the four entrants were challenged to get the best out of an aged oolong from Taiwan, a first-flush Darjeeling, a five-year-old cooked pu-erh from Yunnan, and a green matcha. Cups were judged on the quality of infusion, colour, taste, volume, and presentation.

The winner was one of the three Americans, Steven Downer of Alaska, and coffee baristas will be interested to know that he was the contestant who used a thermometer to get his temperatures right, not relying on his own estimation.

The one European entrant was from Holland, where they too were ahead of us, by holding their first tea championship in May.

Steven Downer said after his win: "Whether you have a hundred-dollar tea or ten-dollar tea, the point is to do the best you can to get the taste out. An instant culture wants everything in a hurry - we have to pay attention to the art of tea and still keep in mind that we live in a fast-paced society."

Meanwhile, we are told that one item of news from the UK drew some amusement and indeed derision at the Tea Expo.



Steven Downer of Alaska mixes his winning matcha

There are several standard PR strategies for making a story where none exists, and a favourite one is to carry out some 'scientific' research. One which was recently reported in the British press concerned research by the University of Northumbria into 'the perfect cup of tea'.

It reportedly took the researchers 180 hours of work to pronounce the following - the best method is to add boiling water to a tea bag in a mug and leave for two minutes, remove the bag, add milk and leave for six minutes.

A senior lecturer was reported as claiming that his taste panel reported

prevalent wood and grass flavour notes in black tea, but that the addition of milk significantly replaced these with preferable notes of toffee and vanilla. (The research turned out to have been commissioned by a milk company).

Helpfully, the research went on to say that if tea is left for 17 minutes and 30 seconds, it will be past its best.

What had staggered the world tea expo was the idea that the 'perfect' cuppa involves a tea-bag, never mind a mug, and that many of the world's greatest and finest teas, which do not work with milk, must presumably be discarded... the concept of British everyday builders' tea, which the researchers must have worked on, is of course unknown in many cultures.

Meanwhile, back at the coffee Brewer's Cup, readers will recall our recent coffee story about how Keith O'Sullivan, a coffee drinker from outside the industry, won the Irish contest... he has now taken the world title as well, coming out above both the British and Australian coffee-trade entrants!

In keeping with the usual bizarre selection of prizes which are becoming the habit for coffee contests, Keith tells us that he won a Bunn Trifecta, two grinders, a set of cups, an Aeropress, and... a massage.



Kaldi

A Philadelphia woman is suing the Dunkin' Donuts, saying a worker mistakenly put sugar in her coffee. The lawsuit claims she asked for artificial sweetener to be added to her coffee, and after drinking the coffee experienced dizziness. She seeks unspecified damages.

The Sunderland Echo reported very neatly and poetically, if a touch unsympathetically, the story of the Rington's tea delivery driver who had his cash bag stolen by a snatch thief. Police, said the paper, are 'searching for a tea-leaf'.

Kaldi has received another delightful piece of Starbucks-speak. In response to a question concerning the six stores in Ireland which recently closed, the chain responded: "the recession revealed that for the long-term health of the business it was right to close them. We were able to redeploy employees who wanted to stay with the company. As a result Starbucks in Ireland is a business which is now in a better place". Exactly where, we have yet to find out...



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