

H&B unveils refurbished Chelmsford store



AHEAD of reopening to the public on 29 July, Holland & Barrett (H&B) CEO Tony Buffin took *NPN* on a virtual tour of the retailer's newly-refurbished Chelmsford store, which has been restructured to make the user experience more efficient, enjoyable and COVID-safe.

Visually, explains Buffin, the store now features more wood – a design change intended to communicate the chain's ethos of natural and plant-based products. A reflection of these socially-distanced times, hand sanitizer, sinks and screens are positioned throughout, while a temperature checking device sits at the door. "It's not hugely invasive. I think this gives people confidence," he says.

The spacious new set-up now sees food and sports nutrition at the back, and supplements and beauty at the front, in a layout which guides customers through their shopping experience. In more normal times, maintaining flow up and down the aisles enhanced shopper experience; now, explains Buffin, it has become a matter of safety. "I didn't think we'd say this six months ago, but you sort of want to be guided through the store; you feel a bit uncomfortable if somebody's walking towards you now. We've got a sensible flow in store. Customers are expecting that."

With the floor plan adapted to position immunity products front and centre upon entry, Buffin believes it will be easier to promote health without the customer having to spend long in store. "It enables cus-

tomers to get in, get immunity products, get to till, pay and walk out."

While bigger in appearance, the branch has not moved sites – rather, an additional 220 sq ft was acquired through taking over former warehouse space. "We felt it was really important to ... make stores easier to operate. There's virtually no back-shop, we're not bringing product from a mini-warehouse at the back of store – we've got cabinets under the shelving so we can just replenish straight to shelf. It's much more efficient for us but hopefully the product is displayed better for customers."

New features

The Chelmsford site is testing a number of digital features, introducing QR codes to provide product information (lessening the chance of customers picking up items they may not end up buying); virtual consultations to allow shoppers to avoid communal touch points and limit face-to-face interaction; and click and collect. "You receive a barcode or QR code when you buy the product [online], you scan it in front of the scanner, a door opens, you take your product and you can leave. You don't even need to touch the store at all. We'll obviously look to roll that out throughout the estate when we get the chance."

In a small consultation room at the back, H&B now offers free private health consultations. "We can either do a personal consultation or we can do a video consul-

HFMA Bulletin

Martin Last,
MPL Marketing Ltd



EU adopts Farm to Fork Strategy

Despite remote working, the work of the EU Commission continues, which is why the work of the European Federation of Health Product Associations (EHPM) is so vital to help ensure our industry's representation on a European stage.

On 20 May, the EU Commission adopted a comprehensive new Biodiversity Strategy to bring nature back into our lives and a Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, environmentally friendly food system. The two strategies are mutually reinforcing, bringing together nature, farmers, business and consumers to jointly work towards a competitively sustainable future.

The Biodiversity Strategy tackles the key drivers of biodiversity loss. The Farm to Fork Strategy will enable the transition to a sustainable EU food system that safeguards food security and ensures access to healthy diets sourced from a healthy planet. It also proposes ambitious measures to ensure that the healthy option is the easiest for EU citizens, including improved labelling.

The two strategies are generally welcomed and will result in new legislation as they are implemented. They have been adopted during the heart of the pandemic; the Commission sees them as a central element of the recovery plan, crucial to building resilience to future outbreaks and providing business and investment opportunities to restore the EU's economy.

The EHFM fully supports the Farm to Fork strategy and believes food supplements will play a role in its implementation, by promoting the importance of safety and quality of the food ingredients used in supplements, as well as easy to understand information.

In this context, it is rather timely that the Commission has published its Regulatory Fitness and Performance (REFIT) evaluation

of the nutrition and health claims regulation (NCHR) Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006. The EHFM has contributed to this process and has highlighted to the Commission that the inappropriate demand for medical-style scientific proof has resulted in an impractical authorization process that is alien to the culture of the food industry and beyond its expertise. As we have seen, only a small number of health claims have been authorized; EHFM has indicated that most of these are based on established science about the impact of vitamins and minerals on health, instead of innovative scientific research on the role of food in achieving better health results. The effect is that consumers do not have access to the information about the health benefits of the foods and supplements they purchase.

The EHFM has been proactively working to develop a solution that would address the requirement for scientific stringency, be practical for the industry and provide consumers with the information that they are looking for on the foods they consume.

EHFM's graded approach is a concrete proposal that adapts the current assessment process to evaluate the over 2,000 botanicals' health claims currently on hold. Three grades of claim assessment are proposed, each supported by appropriate levels of evidence: scientifically accepted claims, claims that are scientifically well supported, and traditional use claims.

The pandemic may have knocked Brexit off the list of most discussed topics, but the work by the EHFM continues. Even after our expected departure from the EU, the impact of such developments will continue to influence UK legislation, and our ongoing commitment to work with the EHFM remains an important part of this process.

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The Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) is the voice of the natural health industry. For further information, advice or details about membership, visit www.hfma.co.uk

tation [with specialists] back in Nuneaton."

Other features include: increased sustainable household products; a new refill station to replace the old 'pick and mix' bay – which Buffin says no longer felt like 'the right thing to do'; a free water refill point; and personalized subscription service Health Box, which serves various

concerns from sleep, stress and anxiety to immunity, digestion and support for vegan diets.

While a refurbishment of this scale might seem ambitious during a pandemic, Buffin says the plans have been a long time in the making. "We've been working on it for nearly a year. When COVID hit I took a conscious

decision to say 'This is really important that we get our store set up' ... because digitization is likely to be a bigger part of how people interact with us in future. I wanted to give our teams a sense that we are still investing in our stores. We took a conscious decision to keep going. It has not, as you can imagine, been as easy as normal."