

# Colin isn't a load of pollacks

Sainsbury's rebranding of an underrated fish shows how the supermarket marketing tide is turning

First, a sincere apology for last week's column. The OLOF spectacles that rendered all advertising invisible and Prail, the company behind the specs, were both anagrams and part of a really bad April Fool's column. *Marketing* will next be published on April Fool's day in 2015, so I promise no more joke columns until at least then. That's an important commitment, because this week's column might also seem a bit foolish at first sight, but I can assure you, this one is for real.

On Monday, Sainsbury's rebranded a fish – the pollack, to be precise. It seems that despite pollack being much more plentiful, environmentally sound and cheaper than cod or haddock, the supermarket's research has revealed that the fish's unattractive name and reputation as only good enough for the cat have proven too big a perceptual barrier for consumers to overcome.

So this week Sainsbury's has started to promote pollack using the French name for the fish which is – wait for it – colin. No, not Colin as in Firth; Colin as in Powell, which is how the French say it. Not content with the fancy new name, Sainsbury's also hired designer Wayne Hemingway to overhaul the line's packaging with a Jackson Pollock-inspired, multi-coloured theme. Last week, it was boring old pollack; this week, it is a post-modern-packaged, French-accented envirofish.

Usually, at this point, I would evoke the universal, one-word rule of all

rebranding strategies: don't. Unless your organisation must change a brand name for legal reasons, stay well away from the dangerous, career-shredding world of rebranding. It looks good on the flip chart at the branding agency, but the post-launch reality is usually a disaster. Customers and employees hate the new name, the company's leadership cringe when asked to support it, and the media rips apart the strategy and those idiot marketers behind it.

Even if a rebrand is received positively by the public (and it won't be) it still makes no sense in financial terms. It can easily cost a brand £1bn or more to build global brand awareness these days, so why dump your existing identity if you don't have to? Better to work on the brand associations and attempt to realign them with consumer tastes than rip it all up and start again

**'This is a minor campaign, but major evidence of why Sainsbury's marketers are on top of their game'**



with a name immediately associated with marketers and artificiality.

So has Sainsbury's made a big mistake with its colin campaign? I am not so sure. A closer look at the packaging reveals a tongue firmly in cheek. 'Colin by name, pollack by nature' suggests that this is perhaps more about PR than a real rebranding effort.

In reality, Sainsbury's is onto a winner. It will get acres of free coverage for a product that will sell very well over Easter. At the same time, it gets to reinforce its green credentials, fresh food reputation and continuing quest for consumer value. And to the marketing community, it again demonstrates that Justin King's team is among the savviest on the high street.

If you had asked the formerly superior marketers at Tesco to sell more pollack over Easter, they would have inevitably opted for a big-type ad with a picture of pollack and a sticker claiming: 'Our pollack is as cheap as Aldi's', then tried to sell you a bank account on the back of it.

Over at Sainsbury's, however, more nimble marketing minds are at work. Its inspirational 'rebranding' of pollack is a minor campaign, but major evidence of why it is on top of its game at the moment. It's creative, it's bang on brand, it's going to sell a ton of product – and it will cost next to nothing to execute.

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## 30 seconds on... the colin formerly known as pollack

■ Despite the fact that Sainsbury's claims to shift more pollack than any other supermarket, it still sells **13 kilos of cod** for every kilo of pollack sold. Designer Wayne Hemingway said: 'It seems daft that pollack isn't more popular, particularly when it's readily available off our own coast, tastes great and is **cheaper than cod.**'



Sainsbury's trying to divert consumer interest from dwindling cod

■ The fish, in its new packaging, has gone on sale in **10 Sainsbury's stores** to determine whether the rebranding will appeal. The line includes 10 Sainsbury's Basics colin fish fingers, priced **47p**, compared with **£1.79** for its top cod variety.

■ Alison Austin, environment manager at Sainsbury's, said it was time to make pollack

more appealing to British shoppers: 'Many people have said that they can't even tell the **difference in taste** between cod and pollack, so we urge everyone to try "colin and chips" on a Friday.'

■ Interestingly, the late film producer **Sydney Pollack** also changed his name. His family's original Russian-Jewish surname was Polak.