

Growing ahead of the competition

Q 2017 has been a tumultuous year for our industry. What's your view of the state of the market at the moment, and what do you think the next 12 months hold?

The big unknown within wholesale is the impact of the Booker/Tesco merger. Will Booker now have better terms and pricing than the rest of the wholesale sector? When will Tesco/Booker start using their leverage to gain market share within wholesale and especially the convenience store sector? The answer is nobody knows but we must be prepared for a large-scale shake-up within wholesale with more consolidation likely.

Q What are the industry's main challenges and opportunities in 2018?

For Confex and our members the challenge continues to remain viable against larger competitors. Our focus is still to gain a level playing field with suppliers and continue the focus on customer service. Through this focus we can create more opportunities as we remain the 'local wholesaler of choice' for the end user. We are confident that customer-focused strategy can also help the Confex wholesaler to 'weather the storm' of the large-scale changes afoot within the wholesale sector.

Q What have been your company's highlights (trading or otherwise) in 2017?

We have had a record 32 new members and associate members join. Our Group turnover has increased and we are on track to hit £3bn Group turnover by 2020. From a head office viewpoint we have held a record nine Confex events plus a relaunched website

with added functionality for both member and supplier. We have also redeveloped our online ordering for Confex Central Distribution, which celebrated 10 years of trading by reaching £30m turnover for the first time.

Q What are you doing to generate new business?

We will continue to help the independent wholesaler and are keen to take on any new member who will help make us stronger as a Group. Our focus is helping our members grow and giving them the tools to help them diversify into new product categories while remaining competitive across our key trading areas.

Q How do you aim to grow your online business over the next year or so?

With the relaunch of our new website and online ordering system for Confex Central Distribution we have the infrastructure in place to push online during 2018 and beyond. We have added Instagram to our social media platforms (currently Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter) and our plans include integrated online marketing strategies with our suppliers and their promotional schedules.



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Q What's your view on the current state of wholesaler-supplier relations? How can suppliers help wholesalers moving forward – and what good examples of co-operation have you seen?

Our suppliers, as a whole, are very receptive to Confex and the challenges within the wholesale sector. We hope that they will resist the pressure which will undoubtedly be applied by Tesco/Booker to price the smaller independent wholesalers out of the market. We have been particularly impressed with PepsiCo, which has listened to our issues and been able to adapt to our members' specific needs. This has led to double-digit growth, taking into account a price increase and a

premium-priced brand within a weak economic climate. It is great to see a large global brand still give focus to its smaller customers and be rewarded with exponential growth ahead of the sector.

Q How are external factors affecting shopper behaviour? What impact will they have on our sector?

Food to go and chilled are set to continue their growth within convenience, which, in turn, presents an opportunity for our retail-focused members. Consumer buying habits have changed, with the focus given to 'food for tonight' now a major drive and opportunity for convenience. Confex will continue to expand our chilled offering as our members increase their multi-temp fleets in response to customer demand.

Q Can you reveal your plans or projects for 2018?

We will continue to implement our Group strategy to hit £3bn Group turnover by 2020. To this end we are adapting our member events, which will start with a regional Scottish event in February and end with a London November event via our fifth annual Member Incentive in Italy during September.