

Shaping up for a brighter future

by David Shrimpton



A great asset to the community. We'd be lost without him. Those were a just a couple of the comments from locals in the village of Sutton Bonington, south-west Nottinghamshire, in relation to Sarj Patel and his 430sq ft Pasture Lane Stores, which has been serving the community for the past 27 years.

Packed full of products across a wide range of categories, but without feeling cramped, the store is obviously popular with the village's 2,200 residents, who use it not only for top-up missions but also weekly basket shops. Patel reckons basket spend these days is about £10 per person and weekly turnover stands at between £13,000 and £15,000.

Significant investment

The store has enjoyed a substantial uplift over the last nine months following a £45,000 refit last May that extended the selling space by 25%, added a 3.25-metre chiller for alcohol as well as a coffee-to-go station, and introduced Patel's own Pasture Lane Stores fascia to replace the Lifestyle Express brand he previously traded under.

While pleased with the results, Patel remains keen to develop the business even further, which is why he applied to join the Partners in Action initiative launched last year by Independent Retail News in conjunction with the Partners for Growth unbiased category improvement scheme from Unilever.

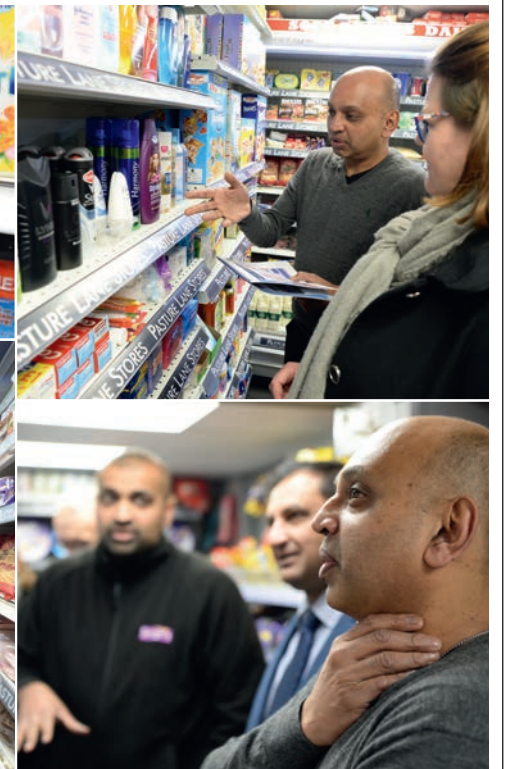
He was selected as one of three winners and Independent Retail News visited the store last month (January), together with Amanda Quinton, channel category executive at Unilever, and leading retailers Mandeep Singh and Kishor Patel, members of the Partners for Growth Retailer Advisory Panel, to provide a store-wide perspective.

Keen to improve

Sarj Patel was particularly keen to enlist some help in improving his household and toiletries categories, so Quinton drew on planogram advice from the Partners for Growth website to create new-look



Sarj Patel:
Owner, Pasture Lane Stores



The mentors' 10-point fix



Kishor Patel and Mandeep Singh, long-standing members of Unilever's Partners for Growth Retailer Advisory Panel, provided these recommendations after visiting Pasture Lane Stores:

1. Give the store a general tidy-up, with particular focus on the floor, ceiling and facing-up of products where necessary to ensure the store is as easy and pleasant to shop as possible.
2. Replace current Pasture Lane Stores shelf-stripping with branded pricing signage as this will give shoppers a sense of value and help their decision-making. Introduce branded T-shirts for staff featuring the Pasture Lane Stores brand.
3. Run a customer survey to find out how customers feel about the store and what they want from it. A survey can be downloaded from the Partners for Growth website and adapted.
4. Develop 'pre-order' sales of bulkier items such as dog food and big tubs of washing powder for local farmers and residents who don't want to travel 10 miles to a big supermarket.
5. There could be an opportunity to highlight local provenance of fresh and chilled products using a label, to reinforce the 'village store' perception.
6. Place additional baskets inside the store by the chiller, to help increase customer basket spend.
7. Use social media – especially Facebook – to further engage with the local community, communicate deals, offers, new products, competitions and customer events. Shop assistant, who

already has social media marketing experience, could be tasked with running this.

8. Make better use of outside space at the front of store – for example, by introducing fresh fruit and vegetables (including seasonal produce such as strawberries in the summer) and flowers.

9. Increase community engagement by building on the existing "Bollywood Night" event that

raises funds for local good causes once a year. Additional activity could include a summer barbecue in conjunction with the neighbouring pub or a fireworks display with the village primary school.

10. Develop a monthly leaflet drop to the local catchment area, containing special offers and newly stocked or niche items. Leaflets to be Pasture Lane Stores branded. Look to secure wholesaler support.

recommended layouts for both fixtures, tailored to the store's location and the affluence of its customers, as well as drawing on category data about consumer trends and best-selling lines.

Key recommendations

In laundry products, key recommendations included bringing in the Daz powder regular 10-wash pack, which is a best-seller in convenience, and adding an extra shelf (taking the total to three). This would allow the store to stock a slightly broader range, catering for shopper preferences such as bio and non-bio, powders and capsules. Quinton also recommended reviewing and possibly de-listing a few SKUs, such as one of the three varieties of Fairy washing-up liquid or one of the three dish-wash SKUs on offer, in order to make room for the best-sellers.

Better separation

A further suggestion was to create a better-segmented fixture by clearly separating household cleaners from laundry products to make it more shopper-friendly. "Create a bit more

of a block," she said. "Shoppers don't always look across the whole fixture."

Fixture review

In toiletries, the advice was to ensure the five-shelf fixture contained a breadth of products catering for a variety of different shopper requirements.

"Make sure you're using your space and that you're covering all the different need-states," Quinton said. "It's key to ensure all segments are being catered for."

She again recommended reviewing certain SKUs and replacing them with best-sellers, such as Lynx Africa variants in body spray and body wash.

And if more room is needed for toiletries, the advice was to review the household cleaning fixture to create more space. "It may be you don't need all those different lines, such as two types of air freshener. It's certainly worth looking at."

For more information and advice, go to: partnersforgrowth.unilever.com