

# Turning over a new Leaf with plenty to chew on

Tony Camp likes to get stuck into Leaf's confectionery business and his quiet but steely approach is paying dividends. Claire Hu reports

Leaf UK managing director Tony Camp does not like to shout. He developed his democratic approach to management 25 years ago when he started work as a production line manager for Cadbury's Mini Rolls. The fresh-faced history graduate found himself in charge of a group of men all old enough to be his father – an experience he describes as a baptism of fire into the food industry.

"I learnt you had to earn respect by listening," he recalls. "There is always a dominant character on a production line and you have to make an ally of them."

Camp, 46, took on his first MD post at the confectionery supplier 16 months ago and his quiet but steely approach has paid dividends.

At first, after moving from his job as marketing director at Burton's Foods, Camp says he found a dormant business where the sales force did not have laptops and there was no clear strategy for growing the company's brands, which include Chewits, Lutti, Malaco and own-label production for the likes of Asda and Marks and Spencer.

Today, the business has a turnover of £30m, is back in profit and sales are growing at 10% a year in value. The company was bought by venture capitalists CVC and Nordic Capital in February.

Having previously worked for US venture capitalists Hicks, Muse, Tate & Furst at Premier Brands, Camp says he learnt a "helicopter" management style of rolling up his sleeves and getting stuck in, as well as the importance of adapting at speed to market trends. According to colleagues, he has a habit of going out with field sales reps, even putting stickers on packs, and making sales calls. "I've never heard him raise his voice, but he has a natural authority," says one.

Camp says he had to make major changes at Leaf to reinvigorate the business. "My job was to grow the top line, and I had to know very quickly who to bring in on the sales force. I introduced category management and shopper research and tried to give the sales team focus and selling tools as well as aligning the commercial and operational teams. The factory was also being under-utilised."

He adds: "It's been quite a mini-revolution at Leaf to bring in pace and innovation to a business that was not in profit, but most of the staff were desperate to have someone come in and show them what to do."

However, Camp admits there is a thin line to tread between his natural tendency to take a longer-term growth view and delivering short-term results for the company's owners. His priority now is to grow the £19m Chewits brand to £30m in the next three to five years.

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With confectionery at a virtual standstill and the children's obesity debate raging, he believes this will be achieved only through stealing share from rivals – Leaf UK is among the top ten in UK confectionery [IRI] – and by bringing genuinely fresh concepts to the market based around packaging, convenience, health and indulgence.

Although Leaf UK has taken artificial colourings and flavours out of Chewits and added real fruit juice, and is now exploring reduced-sugar offerings, Camp believes the industry would be tying its own noose if it marketed sweets as anything other than a treat.

He sees confectionery being polarised between two extremes of smaller sizes with less sugar on one hand, and indulgence products on the other, a trend which is being played out in the crisps and snacks sector.

He describes Chewits as a sleeping giant which needs waking up. The 40-year-old brand has the same heritage as products such as Smash and Typhoo, but has become a sweet mainly for kids aged five to 10. As part of his shake-up of the brand, Camp reintroduced retro flavours of orange, mint and ice cream in April as well as adding Xtremely Hot Lime in a bid to attract teenagers and adults. His plans for Chewits in 2006 include a packaging concept which he promises will be entirely new to the market.

"It's going to be a new bag format with the aim of driving sales among young adults," he reveals. "It's very difficult to get listings these days. You need a format that is completely different and creative twists to make the consumer sit up and take notice," he says.

Chewits is back on TV for the first time, fitting in with Camp's virtuous circle principle of reinvesting profits back into the brand. He is also exploiting his contacts in the industry to bring out Vimto-branded stickpack sweets, the most recent addition being Vimto Tongue Ticklers, which make the mouth fizz in the same way as the sparkling Vimto drink.

Despite the challenges being faced by the industry, Camp has no regrets about his move to Leaf. He left Burton's, where he was in charge of marketing brands such as Jammie Dodgers and Wagon Wheels, because he did not want to move his family from their Lancashire home after Burton's relocated sales and marketing to St Albans.

Camp's three children – aged seven, 10 and 13 – are now his best market researchers for potential new sweets he is thinking of bringing out. "I didn't want to leave Burton's, but my family comes first. It was my chance to see if I could be a successful MD and I saw real potential in Leaf," he says.



## Q&A

### **How did you get to where you are today?**

I did a history degree at Lancaster University and then decided I wanted to work in the food industry. My father worked in packaging and he was the one who gave me a taste for working for a private business rather than in public ownership.

I wrote to 100 food companies and 25 years ago got a job as production line manager at Cadbury. My grandfather was pleased when he heard it was Cadbury, as in those days it was seen as being like Barclays. The brands were all very familiar and it was a very paternalistic company.

In 1986, I went into marketing at Premier Brands and in 1995 I moved to Paris to run Premier Brands (France), where I sold Cadbury biscuits to the French.

I came back to the UK two years later and ended up as marketing director for Premier Biscuits. In 2000, I became marketing director of the newly created Burton's Foods. In February last year I got the MD job at Leaf UK after being approached by the previous owner, Dutch sugar company CSM.

### **What is a typical day like?**

I get up at 6.30am and wake the kids, two girls and a boy, at 7am. My wife Judy works in e-business at Lancaster Uni. I leave for Southport at about 7.45am, and have a lovely hour's commute along countryside roads when I listen to Radio 5 Live.

The first thing I do in the office is look at yesterday's sales. I find asking awkward questions is better than shouting. Every two weeks or so we have an NPD meeting and I sometimes go out with the field sales people or go through calls with them, which takes all day.

Lunch is a low-carb cheese and ham sandwich in the Tesco car park when I read The Daily Telegraph and listen to 5 Live. In the afternoon I'll sometimes have debrief meetings with the factory, but I am much less involved in production than the commercial side.

I'll leave the office at about 6pm and help the kids with homework. Or I may be doing hockey training with the Lancaster Veterans.