

Spaghetti Junction



After her many years in the industry - Tigerprint, Hallmark and now Card Factory - Jo Bennett knows her stuff without doubt. However, as the first keynote speaker at the recent GCA Conference, it was her ability to serve up a 'full menu' of facts, figures and conjecture on the immediate past as well as the future card buying behaviours without causing indigestion and leaving the audience with a hunger for more, that was so impressive.

Top: Jo Bennett's talk was an unravelling of the crazy spaghetti time that Covid caused.
Above left: Jo in full flow at the recent GCA AGM and Conference.
Above right: The 'positive hedonists' are looking to make up for lost moments.
Right: The two (not mutually exclusive) camps people are in right now.



An image of a baby with a bowl of spaghetti tipped over its head - what better way is there to kick off a keynote presentation which unravelled how the crazy Covid times have affected greeting card buying and more importantly, how the new and future habits present opportunities for our sector?

PG feasted on the food for thought delivered with perfect seasoning by Jo Bennett, studio director of Card Factory at last month's GCA Conference and AGM.

"So, what happened?" began Jo, putting into context the effects of Covid and the first lockdowns on our nation's card buying. "Five million people stopped buying cards in store; frequency dropped by 9% and a third of buyers, probably the older generation, bought fewer cards," said Jo whisking through the tough stuff. "Online growth accelerated three to five years with four times more cards being bought online," Jo added.

Then she turned her attentions to what habits will remain, now lockdowns are hopefully a thing of the past.

"21% of workers will continue to work from home which bodes well for retail parks and local high streets doing well," she said,



with less good news for those retailers in major conurbations.

Accepting that the percentage of greeting cards being bought online has increased significantly and is likely to remain so, Jo also referred to research findings from Kantar that of all consumer products, greeting cards have shown the "fastest and steepest switch back from online" to physical stores. This reassuring news, especially for the retailers in the audience, was trumped by Jo relaying how another data source has predicted that the UK greeting card market will grow to £1.9 billion over the next five years.

While, like others in the room, Jo said she felt this figure was a little optimistic, there were real opportunities out there to appeal to new greeting card shoppers with relevant greeting cards that are in line with emerging habits, priorities and sensibilities.

Jo suggested that people's current mindsets fall roughly into two camps, those who 'live life to the full' and those who 'live life for the future'. In the first camp are what Jo describes as the "positive hedonists" who, after the sacrifices made over the last 20 odd months are all up for treating friends and family, as reflected in the increased sales Card Factory has been experiencing in age birthday cards as well as new celebrations that have been cropping up on Pinterest, citing 'Death of my twenties' and 'Cheers n Beers' as two examples.

After 71% of weddings having been postponed, there is a definite feeling of making up for lost time, "which is brilliant for us" signalling not only a spike in wedding sales, but also suggesting that 'sequel



are here to stay," says Jo, with the 'our house to your house' card caption likely to be a more common send than previously.



Well before COP26, Gen Z especially has elevated the importance of sustainability with Jo sharing that 69% of this age group stating they would be prepared to pay more for a product if it had strong eco credentials, with the drive for UK manufactured greeting cards gaining even more momentum.

The changing shape of families as well as the increasing multi-faceted society will also continue to impact on the greeting cards on offer with multi-family households,

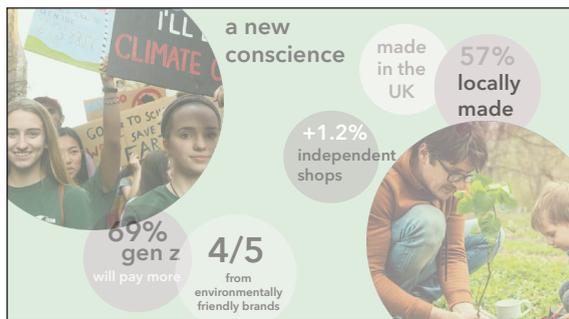
Top: The younger generation out shopping in a Card Factory. **Top inset:** Card Factory's studio director Jo Bennett combined her wealth of industry experience overlaid with research findings in her engaging keynote. **Above left:** Sustainability is part of the buying conscience for Gen Z, the new generation of card buyers. **Above right:** The Netflix series *Bridgerton* is expected to have an influence on wedding card designs!

2.9 million lone parents and the 5.4 million people becoming UK citizens in the next five years.

Empathy, inclusion and celebrating diversity (from religion to gender to race), will be reflected in the cards published and bought.

"Card sales for Eid and Diwali, for example, are growing and will become mainstream," predicts Jo. "And the growth of multi-family households will see more 'you've been like a mother to me' captions being required," she also suggests with the high number of lone parents signalling a need for more captions such as 'you are my Mum and my Dad' for Spring Seasons events.

In her conclusion, Jo stressed that as long as the greeting card industry remains in line with the public's re-evaluation of what is important to them, and designs are in tune with the card buying needs of the new generation of card senders, while continuing to serve the current core buyers, no one should end up with a bowl of spaghetti on their head!



wedding parties' and first anniversaries will offer more opportunities.

The other 'live life for the future' camp taps into the increased importance on sustainability and the communities of which we are a part, both of which have a bearing on greeting card purchases.

Being part of a kinder society, Jo feels is something that will continue, the 'I'm thinking of you' cards are not going away.

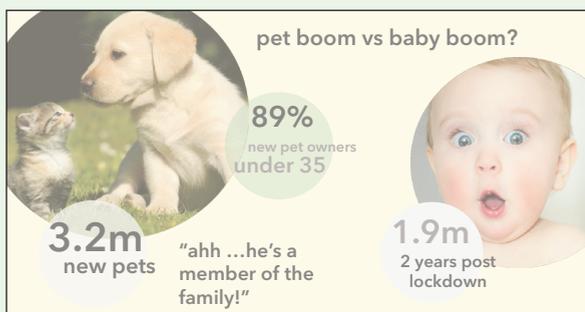
"You only need to think about the support for the NHS, neighbours and looking out for friends to see some lifestyle changes



Heary petting beat baby love

When the lockdown first happened a baby boom was predicted. In actual fact it was a 'furry baby bonanza' that won the hearts and minds of the UK's pandemic people, presenting something of what is turning out to be a sizeable bonus to the greeting card community.

Sharing the facts, Jo relayed how some 3.2 million new pets have joined families over the last 20 months, 85% of these 'pet parents' being under 35 years old. This means there are now 12 million dogs and 12 million cats in the UK pet population, all of whom are potential greeting card 'givers' as well as 'receivers'.



"Not only have we seen imagery of cats and dogs rocketing, but as pets are very much seen as part of the family they have generated considerable card sales," said Jo revealing that a 'from the dog' Father's Day design was right up there in the best sellers list for Card Factory this year.

While in terms of numbers, pets trounced the 1.9 million babies born over the last two years, while fewer than predicted, she highlights that this still means "1.9 million more birthdays" and with a second baby boom mooted now things are returning more to normal, it won't just be every dog that will have its day!

Left: The slide Jo showed during her presentation.