



'By emphasising uniqueness, Waitrose will stand out in grocery'

With Waitrose also part of the biggest changes to John Lewis Partnership in decades, including its own rebrand, the grocer's managing director **Rob Collins** sets out his vision

Waitrose has always been different. Its ownership structure and unrivalled focus on product and service set it apart from other grocery retailers.

Our rebranding as Waitrose & Partners will emphasise these differences. Through our committed, knowledgeable partners, our love of food and unstinting levels of customer service, we will demonstrate the extent to which we stand out. The rebranding symbolises our conviction that we can thrive through differentiation.

Why are we doing this now? Because it accurately reflects who we are today. But it's also a response to the reshaping of UK grocery. A raft of behavioural and technological changes has disrupted things. The rise of the discounters, the internet and the growth of 'little and often' top-up shopping have altered the landscape. We see a polarisation between the function of buying and the experience of buying.

As a result, profitability across our sector has been hit.

There are two ways to respond. Some supermarkets are chasing scale; the wave of tie-ups is predicated on the idea that increased size will lead to efficiencies and greater profitability.

Others, like us, are responding by differentiating. Consumers have always liked shops that offer special experiences and service. So while our rivals join forces and become more similar in the process, we are going the other way: we are emphasising our uniqueness. Why get lost in a crowd when you can stand out from it?

The partnership is all about the experience of buying. I want shopping at Waitrose & Partners to be a rich experience, with service at its heart, based on partners' and customers' shared love of food. We are setting out from a position of strength. But I believe we can do things even better.

All 55,000 of our partners will become food ambassadors for Waitrose. They will share their favourite recipes with customers and spread their knowledge about the products

we sell. We'll give them plenty to talk about, with our recently opened Food Innovation Studio helping us to step up the pace of product development.

We will also increase the number of specialists in our shops: wine and cheese experts, fruit and veg gurus, coffee baristas and healthy eating specialists. We will be a place where quality food is a way of life.

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But it's not just about the partners who work in our stores, it's about the suppliers and farmers we partner with too. When it comes to small suppliers, we have a proven track record of helping brands grow. This will continue. As the UK leaves the EU, it is part of Waitrose's duty to the nation to do everything we can to support our precious farming and fishing industries.

We want our customers to value everything about us, including how our products are sourced. We also want them to know that we take care of the environment. We are proud of our groundbreaking work in this area, such as being the first supermarket to exclusively sell paper-stem cotton buds, or entirely remove takeaway disposable cups.

By the end of 2018 we will also have stopped using black packaging for all our meat, fish, fruit and vegetables – a big step on the way to ditching it from all packaging by 2019 and to make all packaging widely recyclable, reusable or home compostable by 2025. There will be many more such initiatives.

Central to our new strategy is a steadfast conviction in what we do. I don't believe we should be concerned about having a 5% share of the UK grocery market. Rather, we should be concerned about being the best 5% in the grocery market.

We are Waitrose & Partners and we will make our difference count. **RW**



Waitrose & Partners' new-look trolleys