



Campbell Embraces Its Brands' Roles as "Fabric of the Nation"



October 2020

This is an edited version of IRI's Growth Insights [C-Suite Conversations](#), featuring **Mark Clouse, president and CEO, Campbell Soup Co.**, sharing thoughts on focusing on fundamentals during the pandemic, strategic thinking moving forward and the value of leaning into and applying learnings as manufacturers and retailers navigate unprecedented times.

IRI: [Your Leadership Philosophy](#)

Mark Clouse: For all of us as leaders, I'm not sure that in the last eight months I haven't learned more about leading than perhaps the previous eight years, given the nature of so many new things and new capabilities leaders have to build. One of the biggest areas that I think is evolving is in how we engage with our teams. I believe very strongly in a leadership style that is accessible, that's part in the weeds, and also just part of the team's work to really make sure that you're playing the right role.

IRI: [Managing During a Pandemic](#)

MC: I can feel the ebb and flow of energy – the surge of adrenaline when we're trying to do the right thing to serve our communities and make sure food is available. We're working arm in arm with our retailers to get things done. As that turns into six and seven months, kids going back to school – adding more pressure at home for mom and dad – the economy has put unique pressure on households. And a unique element on top of what we're dealing with and the uncertainty is a lot of political unrest in the country. You add all that up, and as leaders, we have got to be overtly mindful that the mental health and wellbeing of our teams has got to be a priority.

IRI: [Campbell Brands as the "Fabric of the Nation"](#)

MC: I think we have a set of products and a portfolio that has played an incredibly relevant role in what we've experienced. Whether it was the initial need for comfort and the return to those things that make us feel safe and give us something to hang onto in difficult moments, to this explosion of new consumer behavior as it relates to in-home eating. Whether that's cooking

or providing kids lunch, or mom and dad eating at home and not the office, we are going to deliver things that nourish and provide great variety and great positive experiences.

IRI: [Pre-pandemic Corporate Strategy](#)

MC: The first chapter of the journey was anchored on the idea of focus and fundamentals. This was about retooling the portfolio to be focused in the places where we believe we had strong rights to win. Within that we created this concept of winning in soup, which was really about reframing soup. Taking soup from a business where we were probably a little more focused on cost savings and profit generation to a more balanced approach where profitable growth became a much more ambitious goal for us. Right before the pandemic, we had improved quality on our condensed business, and had returned marketing and support to our meals and beverage business. So we really anchored down on getting the businesses right.

IRI: [Responding to Unprecedented Demand](#)

MC: A big part of this story is the heroics of our frontline workers and what they were doing in the plants. In all of the uncertainty that we were experiencing, they were getting up every morning to head to a plant to run food that was in immediate demand – where the cases were leaving the factory as fast as we could make them. Product was going to stores, but also going to food banks in the communities across the continent. That required us to do some things that were immediate, commanding-control moments. We rationalized some SKUs, we really looked at the math of what would it take to ensure that our plants were not necessarily delivering optimal assortment, but delivering optimal quantities.

Other unsung heroes, our procurement team was out there finding us three, four, five times the ingredients, the number of cans – all of this had to come together. That was really the hallmark of the first 90 days of what we were experiencing: taking care of one another in safety and wellness across the company; maximizing the amount of product; and getting food quickly and safely from the factory to the stores. What our team has done is create a sustainable model of acquiring the ingredients and materials that we need. It's nothing short of extraordinary.

IRI: Your Approach Moving Forward

MC: Now cooking is part of life. We've learned about shopping online, which is of course another big trend that emerged. All of the e-commerce shopping has now become part of the way in which we live. A lot of the insights that we're working on aren't so much identifying the macro trends. Those, to a great degree, are undeniable. Now it's about how are we going to uniquely position the company and the portfolio in a way that makes us more competitive and more capable of winning these new occasions or these broader occasions. One of the things that I love about our hand in this moment is that we're probably as versatile as any company out there because so much of what we make is foundational to a wide range of recipes or meal ideas.

IRI: The Role of Data in this Fast-paced Environment

MC: This is what's ultimately going to differentiate companies in many ways going forward. How do we take the multitude of streams of data that we have coming into the company and try to create a way in which that data becomes more usable quicker? IRI has done a great job in having the vision to see that for those who can put these pieces together, it's going to be a significant competitive advantage and really something that's in high demand. What we've been working on is to try to figure out how to weave that data together into an interface; it's our consumer insight engine. It takes our traditional scanner data, our panel data, our social media mining, some of our online universe-oriented data streams, as well as our annual or episodic moments and we're creating a platform in which our marketers and our R&D teams can interface in a far simpler and quicker way. And we

can extract trends. What I believe strongly is that we're seeing a lot of the macro trends that existed a year ago are now being overlaid with the behaviors that have been shaped by the pandemic.

IRI: Navigating E-commerce

MC: I think everybody understood that e-commerce over time would continue to be a bigger part of consumer shopping behavior. But I think there were also some distinct challenges for many manufacturers – assortment, route to market. We now have a much clearer understanding because we've navigated where the pressure points and the opportunities are. We have mined very closely the keys to unlocking success and working with our traditional retail partners on their shelf for click & collect. Assortment, in general, is probably still the biggest thing that is taking work and effort.

Focused and collaborative marketing and media is something that's really exciting. We've learned a lot about what's worked and what's not worked so that we can really be effective going forward. I think we were all a little surprised when we began to get data that really helps us see what's happening. That's another big change for me – we have the data to inform decision making.

IRI: The Future of Marketing

MC: The risk is trying to become everything to everyone. You have to start with the true north of the brand and the core equity. But the manifestation of that equity to build relevance with different consumers may come through in different messages. We're embracing fully that that is the future of marketing. And the beauty of the new media vehicles is it really enables us to execute that in an efficient way.

IRI: Biggest Lesson Learned

MC: What the pandemic has essentially done is taken the trend in e-commerce that was already moving and put a foot in its back and shoved it forward several years. The companies that are nimble enough and adaptive enough to embrace that and get there the fastest are the ones that are going to differentiate themselves in performance over time. At Campbell Soup Co., we're making progress, though there's still a lot to do as we go forward and a lot of opportunities to continue to grow together. So by no means is the mission complete, but I do feel good about the progress we're making. 



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