

Growth is fed by innovation for maker of baby products



Mayborn Group's tommee tippee brand has rapidly expanded into new territories while consolidating its position as this country's number one recommended brand across a range of infant and toddler product categories. EY director SIMON WHITESIDE caught

up with the company's global brands director Martin Cooke to learn about the product innovation at the heart of tommee tippee's success.

MAYBORN Group launched tommee tippee and its original weighted base cup onto the UK infant products market in 1965, having acquired the cup from a US-based inventor.

Since then the Cramlington-based brand, which has products across the feed, change and comfort-time categories, including bottles, soothers, cups and nappy disposal systems – has grown to become number one for newborn and toddler feeding products in Great Britain and has lines available in more than 40 countries.

Throughout its history, innovation has been the lifeblood of tommee tippee's expansion, according to the company's global brands director Martin Cooke.

He said: "Product innovation is critical for growing our business in the UK and across the world, so we've got a huge appetite for it and constantly invest to get it right."

Over a number of years Mayborn has grown both organically and through acquisition, but an investment by private equity firm 3i in 2006

has helped to create a truly global company.

Martin said: "With 3i's support, the shape of our business has turned on its head – 60% of our sales used to come from the UK, now 60% of our sales are in international markets and we expect that number to continue growing."

Mayborn now has direct operations in the US, France and Australia; it is investing for future expansion in areas like China, Russia, South Africa and the Middle East, and it has production facilities in Mansfield, Morocco and China. However, the UK remains one of its most important markets and

innovation is core to its growth. We've taken successful, innovative products in the UK and used them as a springboard for overseas expansion. Our closer to nature range is the perfect example," explained Martin.

The company's revolutionary closer to nature feeding bottle, which is designed to replicate the feel of a mother's breast to help babies make the transition to bottle feeding, has been inundated with awards since its launch in 2006.

Martin said: "That product and the resulting range propelled us in the UK from a brand that had 20% market share of newborn and toddler accessories to one which has more than 40% today."

"We then took the new range – and its innovative brand positioning – and placed it at the heart of our US growth plans, including our recent launch into Walmart, with excellent results. The closer to nature range has been truly transformational for our business."

The company has a large internal new product development team in Cramlington, but Martin believes that everyone within the organisation, as well as some of the firm's suppliers, have roles to play. He said: "To get blockbuster innovation, you need talent, energy and investment –



► tommee tippee's closer to nature feeding bottle, which is designed to replicate the feel of a mother's breast to help babies making the transition to bottle feeding, has won a clutch of awards since appearing in 2006



► tommee tippee's weighted base cups first went on sale in the UK in 1965

and an understanding of how that innovation fits our production and supply chain capabilities.

"Alongside our product teams, we try to foster a culture of innovation throughout our business, including in our graphic design, operations, quality, commercial and brand teams. Everyone can help in delivering an innovative product and taking

it to market. We also use external inventors and agencies, who challenge our thinking."

Martin admitted that one of the firm's biggest challenges is innovating at a rate fast enough to support the company's expansion ambitions.

"There are lots of brands that are trying to innovate," he said, "so we need to develop compelling concepts

and commercialise them quickly, with sufficient global scale and adequate local tailoring.

"The pace of innovation is particularly important when you're trying to deliver growth in the UK market, where we're already number one, and the best way to grow share is through new products. But new and innovative products can also help us to make our name in markets where we are a challenger brand."

The tommee tippee brand has grown significantly over the past few years, but that has not dampened Martin and the Mayborn management team's appetite for expansion.

He concluded: "The business has doubled in size since 2006 and we plan to do the same again over the next five years, although we recognise we face wider economic challenges alongside innovation."

"We're number five in the market globally and we want to be number one. We believe we'll achieve this through investment in our international footprint, underpinned by continuous product innovation."



► Martin Cooke, global brands director at Mayborn Group