

# Harrison Fisher



## Adopting a new design-led strategy has helped Harrison Fisher hit back at the growing threat from cut-price Far East competition.

### Background

Harrison Fisher is a Sheffield knife maker that has been operating since 1838. Much of its market in recent years has been concentrated on supplying supermarket and department store own-brands.

### The problem

Sheffield cutlery is renowned, but manufacturers have become vulnerable to low-cost competition from Europe and the Far East. Harrison Fisher was finding it difficult to compete on cost in the own-brand market.

### The response

The Designing Demand Immerse design team found that Harrison Fisher reacted to the demands of powerful buyers from supermarkets and department stores rather than carving out its own design strategy. They urged the business to develop a strong consumer brand and product range.

MD Alastair Fisher said: 'Ultimately I want to be in a position where if the retailers don't want us to do own label it's not a crisis.'

With the help of the Designing Demand Immerse Design Associate, Harrison Fisher developed a 'brand language'. It decided its Taylors Eye Witness sub-brand should be contemporary but take into account the company's heritage. They commissioned local consultancy Ledgard Jepson, which produced logo and packaging ideas that were clean, uncluttered and modern. These cost £20,000 and were launched at Spring Fair, the UK's leading gift and home trade event, in 2004.

The new designs focused on lifestyle instead of competing on price. In addition, through a consolidation of the packaging types, the company reduced the number of packs from 30 to six, saving money and enabling more efficient management.

For the product redesign, the company and design team agreed it was important to work with up-and-coming talent. Design Associate Jonathan Ball explains: 'We wanted a signature designer - someone like Phillipe Starck - but didn't want the signature to overwhelm the brand.'

Through a competitive selection process the company commissioned Sam Hecht, whose clients include retailer Muji among others. Sam developed a third generation of the Chantry knife sharpener, launched at Spring Fair in 2004 and the Ambiente Fair in Frankfurt, where it received a design award. A very close relationship developed between the company and Hecht. Following the Chantry, he designed a new high quality kitchen knife range and a further contemporary range.

Harrison Fisher raised the profile of Taylor's Eye Witness further by launching the highly distinctive pelican can opener in 2005. Designed by Sheffield consultancy AME Design, it too won an award.

### **Impact**

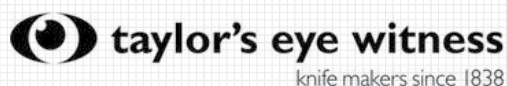
The design work has helped Harrison Fisher move towards being an independent consumer brand. It has led to new business from design-led retailers including Conran Shop and Heals, and the company has also won new export trade from a Japanese distributor. The new product range has also impressed existing customers.

Says Jonathan Ball: 'Harrison Fisher have raised their game. Before, they saw design as a distress purchase. Alastair is now clearly very passionate about the products he is developing with Sam and recognises the value of his investment. He knows that the responses he's getting are not just because the products look different but because they are a part of a clearly communicated new brand and strategy.'

Alastair Fisher adds: 'Before we joined the programme we were aware that some of our larger customers were thinking of sourcing products direct from factories in the Far East. Being part of the programme has helped us to find the answer to this challenge. We're now able to differentiate our offering from our competitors' not only on quality, function and value but also on design.'

'The great thing for us was that we became involved just in time. We had been under a lot of pressure and we had been losing business. The programme helped us get ahead of the competition instead of always playing catch-up, and that is why it has been so very, very important for us. If we had not introduced design into our strategic processes, we would have been in a really difficult position.'

**Campaign website - [www.designingdemand.org.uk](http://www.designingdemand.org.uk)**



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