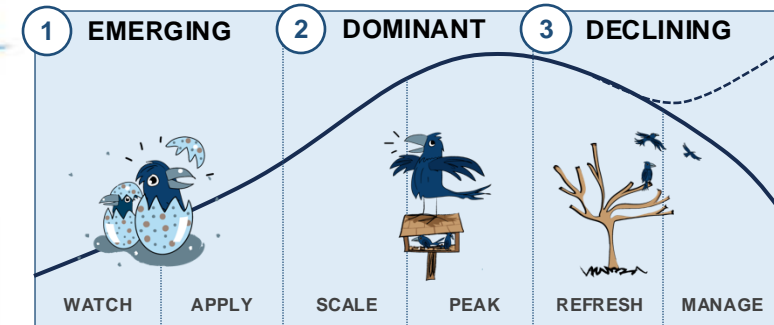




the CROW Chronicle

At the Crow Flies, we think about the trends underpinning innovation in three phases each with two stages:



If you have ambitions of scale, the trick is to be neither too early or too late – easier said than done!

Innovation really matters if you're a brand builder. It's a long-term investment in the health of your business *and* brand. Why? Because consumers notice when brands aren't innovating – they pick up on the sense of stasis and treading water. We've heard it in research: *"if the owner doesn't care about their brand, then why should I?"*. So, we took some time in mid-March to travel up to Manchester and visit lunch! North and the Northern Restaurant & Bar show, co-located in the wonderful Manchester Conference Centre. We've distilled our take down into **eight factors that really matter** for brand innovators...



1 Convenience still rules: with the post-Covid move to more hybrid working, the rising cost of food and drink, and sustainability concerns with over-packaging and waste, it would be easy to see a wholesale return to scratch cooking. But it's not what we hear in our research and it's not what we saw at the show. Rather, there's an increasing focus on small and portioned packs, resealability, workable shelf life and shortcuts that help people in their busy, daily lives. Sure, it's not at any cost (we saw a clearer narrative around the packaging choice made for example) but as we always say, *'don't underestimate the power of convenience'* – and that holds true still. **Dominant / Peak**



5 Packaging Confusion: brand owners seem confused about which packaging is more sustainable than others. In drinks, there are a lot of cans, but also some brands moving back into glass. There are tetra packs, and in food, plenty of multi-layer sachets and plastic cartons. In many cases, a sustainability story is attached to their choice. If brand manufacturers are confused, imagine what it's like for consumers.

6 Break a leg! In a world where it's relatively easy to fast follow, distinctive is being sought beyond the product more than ever – in the Bar Show in particular, there was a lot of theatre at the point of purchase



2 There's a focused health experimentation cycle: two trends really stood out at the show. Firstly, and unsurprisingly, **protein** remains *everywhere* – if you can force protein into cereal, chocolate, pies or snacks, it was there. Clearly 'protein' is an effective shortcut to satiation and underlines that many people feel their protein level is too low. **Dominant / Peak.** Secondly **gut health** was increasingly showing its face chiefly through functional drinks – the show coincided with a big launch for Lipton's Kombucha, but there were great stands too for brands such as Hip Pop who have both a kombucha range and drinks based on apple cider vinegar. **Emerging / Apply.** So, what's next? Mushrooms anyone?



7 Big Bets: based on what we saw, the big bet in food continues to be protein, in drinks it's the move away from alcohol. Whether this is **lifestyle drinks** such as TRIP (which has some functional claims but ultimately targets how we live our lives today); the slow reemergence of **shandy** or, of course **no or low alcohol** (even more prevalent than protein) it's clear that there are a few 'mover and shakers' which brand owners feel are more certain bets than others. The issue is that as each space becomes crowded, brand difference decreases, and consumer confusion increases



3 Less is more: the phrase of the moment is ultra-processed food, but practically there are lots of brands showcasing either 'does not contain' (e.g. seed oils) or has short ingredient lists. **Emerging / Apply**



4 Permissible Indulgence: there's always a lot of virtue signalling on show in new product launches; bear in mind commercialising trends is what it's all about so there were plenty of indulgent products visible too, made permissive either through portion size or ingredients. **Dominant / Scale**



8 Startup Stories: new brand entrants have three 'startup stories'. **Frustration:** 'we weren't happy with how the current players do it' **Person:** 'the founder always had a passion for...' **Place:** real or fantastical, 'x from here is better'



Thanks for reading – if you want to know more about the topics raised here, do get in touch!

