



ENTRY FORM

THE EFFIE AWARDS AOTEAROA IN ASSOCIATION WITH TVNZ – ENTRY FORM

ENTRY ID	686-B09
ENTRY TITLE	Hello Chocolate Lovers
CLIENT	Whittaker's
PRODUCT	Whittaker's brand
FIRST MEDIA APPEARANCE DATE	May 2024
CAMPAIGN START DATE	May 2024
CAMPAIGN FINISH DATE	March 2025
CATEGORY	B09. – Insights & Strategic Thinking
CATEGORY DESCRIPTION	<p>Campaigns that showed the greatest fresh insights and strategic thinking to lead to the communications idea and achieve the marketing objectives. This is the thinking before the creative brief, as opposed to the creative idea or execution. Judges are looking for examples of where an agency has taken a client's brief, and through fresh insight or inspired problem solving, developed a ground-breaking strategic direction. Judges will need to see a clear delineation between the strategic and creative thinking and understand how the strategic and creative platforms have or will deliver long-term success for the brand.</p>

WORD COUNT: 2500 MAX

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY [0%]

Give the judges an understanding of the case they are about to read by providing a brief summary for each of the items below. A one-sentence summary is recommended for each line.

(Maximum: 100 words in total – not included in total word count)

The Challenge:	A Global cocoa crisis, innovation stalling, and shoppers trading down, in a cost-crunched market, brand had to do the heavy lifting to grow Whittaker’s as the category leader.
The Insight:	Real chocolate lovers don’t just eat chocolate; they have secret rituals worth celebrating.
The Strategic Idea/Build:	“Hello Chocolate Lovers” reframed Whittaker’s as a badge for people who feel differently about chocolate.
Bringing the Strategy & Idea to Life:	We transformed everyday rituals into cinematic moments, aligning product, brand, and behaviour with a consistent voice, uniting marketing and product.
The Results:	Annual sales grew +13.7% while prices rose +16.9%, brand preference lifted +1.4pts, and Whittaker’s outpaced a declining category through brand, not discounts.

Why is this entry an outstanding example for effective marketing in this Effie entry category?

(Maximum 90 words – this is not included in total word count)

Because Whittaker’s didn’t just survive a perfect storm of skyrocketing cocoa prices, cost-of-living pressures, and consumer trading down, they grew.

Whittaker’s didn’t chase volume with discounts; we built value with brand.

By celebrating the intimate rituals of real Chocolate Lovers, we turned Whittaker’s from a habitual choice into a deliberate indulgence.

This work proved that in FMCG, effective marketing isn’t necessitated on shouting louder or slashing prices, but making people feel more, and pay more, for what they truly love.

01.	<p>Challenge, Context & Objectives [20%]</p> <p>This section covers your strategic business context for your marketing activity, alongside your key business challenge and objectives.</p> <p>Please provide the necessary context on your industry category, competitors, and brand so the judges, including those unfamiliar with your brand/category, can evaluate your entry. Outline the degree of ambition represented by your objectives. Including historical data may be useful here to provide judges with a clear picture of the situation the brand or organisation found itself in.</p>
01A	<p>Before your effort began, what was the state of the brand's/organisation's business and the overall category in which it competes? What was the strategic challenge that stemmed from this business situation? Provide context on the degree of difficulty of this challenge.</p>
<p>The unexpected storm that forced the brand to carry the weight</p> <p>2024 saw the global cocoa market enter crisis. A perfect storm of El Niño weather patterns, crop disease, and political instability in West Africa drove cocoa prices to an all-time high - more than tripling within months.¹</p> <p>For most chocolate brands, this was painful. For Whittaker's, it had the potential to cause an identity crisis.</p> <p>'Good Honest Chocolate' is core to Whittaker's DNA: ethically sourced, bean-to-bar, never skimping on inclusions, uncompromising on quality.</p> <p>But suddenly, doing things the <i>honest</i> way became the most <i>expensive</i> way.</p> <p>To exacerbate this, Kiwis, squeezed by the cost-of-living crisis, were trading down. They were rethinking small indulgences and choosing cheaper alternatives. Even the most loyal Chocolate Lovers began questioning premium choices.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>This created an unprecedented tension: How do you hold the line on quality when the economics of indulgence are shifting under your feet?</i></p> <p><u>Whittaker's challenge was threefold:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Skyrocketing cocoa costs triggered multiple, unavoidable price increases across the range. 2. NPD was dialled back to manage margins. Removing a critical lever for driving brand excitement. 3. Consumers were trading down or re-evaluating premium choices amid a cost-of-living crunch. <p>With fewer levers to pull and rising prices testing loyalty, the business needed more than a campaign.</p> <p>We needed a creative solution that could insulate the brand, deepen emotional preference, and convince people Whittaker's was worth paying more for; or risk slipping from a deliberate choice to an expendable luxury.</p>	

¹ International Cocoa Organization (ICCO), March 2024 report

01B

What were the objectives you set to address your challenge? For each objective, include: KPI, benchmarks, previous outcomes and the rationale for why it was selected.

Please outline one business/organisational objective and a maximum of 3 marketing and 3 advertising/comms objectives.

Despite a global cocoa crisis, softening sentiment, and rising prices, Whittaker's entered 2024 with a non-negotiable commercial mandate: grow.

This wasn't a vanity ambition, it was a business imperative.

The commissioning of Stage 8, a major new production facility meant volume needed to follow investment. Holding the line wasn't enough. Growth had to be earned, even in a market where growth was statistically unlikely.

Business/ Organisational Objective

1. Grow sales value in a recessionary environment

KPI: +8% YoY uplift in total Whittaker's sales during the 3-month launch period (May–July).

With new production capacity coming online, value growth was critical to maximise ROI and ensure commercial viability in a tough trading context.

Marketing and Communications Objectives

2. Maintain annual demand while increasing unit pricing

KPI: +5% YoY uplift in annual sales (FY25), across the total range.

We needed to demonstrate that brand equity, not pricing discounts, could hold demand at scale, even under inflationary pressure.

3. Defend core Block range with less NPĐ

KPI: +5% YoY uplift in annual 250g Block sales.

With limited innovation and no promotional blitz, defending Block performance was a key stress test for brand salience.

4. Grow brand momentum, especially Preference

KPI: +1pt uplift in brand preference over 12 months.

Preference correlates strongly with pricing power and brand health. A lift here would prove emotional resonance was increasing, even while price was rising.

<p>02.</p>	<p>Insights & Strategy [30%]</p> <p>This section covers the key building blocks of your strategy. Explain to the judges how you arrived at your strategy and clearly articulate that strategy. Focus on the thinking or insight(s) that unlocked your solution and tied it to successfully addressing your objectives.</p> <p>For this category, you need to convince the judges why this entry deserves to win based on your strategy. You need to show how your market analysis, insights and interpretation were developed into a clever strategic direction that was instrumental in the success of the campaign.</p>
<p>02A.</p>	<p>Explain the thinking that led you to your strategy. Explain how any insights discovered were directly tied to your brand, your audiences behaviours and attitudes, your research and/or business situation.</p>

At first glance, Whittaker’s didn’t have a problem.

It was the most loved chocolate brand in New Zealand.

Trust was high. Preference was stable. Penetration unmatched.

But love without understanding is fragile. Especially when times get tough.

As the cost-of-living crisis deepened, shoppers started trading down. Indulgences became luxuries. Loyalty became a maybe. And Whittaker’s, with its premium position and rising prices, faced an uncomfortable truth:

Being loved might not be enough.

Ask a New Zealander what they love about Whittaker’s and they’ll say, “just because.” That’s not a weak answer, it’s a symptom of brand saturation.

But in a tightening economy, “just because” started to crack. When price is rising and cheaper options appear, habit alone can’t justify the spend.

So, we needed to shift from blind love to deliberate passion. Emotional preference that could defend premium pricing.

We looked beyond what people say, to what they do. Into behaviours. Rituals. The slightly weird, deeply human stuff people do when they really care.

And we found something: People don’t just eat Whittaker’s.

They stash it. Hide it. Hoard it.

They have rules. Routines. Rhythms.

They sneak it from shared pantries. Eat it alone. Whisper around it.

They don’t offer it around, and they don’t want to.

The insight:

Chocolate eaters eat chocolate.

But Chocolate Lovers love Whittaker's.

They have sacred, intimate rituals, and they've built those rituals around Whittaker's.

This wasn't just chocolate.

It was a mirror for a very specific kind of joy:

Small, sacred, self-indulgent.

In a market where every other brand was shouting louder, discounting harder, or cranking the NPD wheel faster, our strategy was the opposite:

Celebrate what was already there.

Instead of trying to get more people to notice the brand, we'd make the people who already loved it feel seen. Because when someone feels understood, they value you more.

And when price is under pressure, value is everything.

02B.

What was the Core Idea or strategic build that enabled you to reach your solution?

(Be succinct. A maximum of 50 words.)

Shift Whittaker's from a habitual treat to a deliberate passion - by celebrating the intimate rituals of Chocolate Lovers, and giving voice to the love they already feel for Whittaker's chocolate.

03.

Bringing the Strategy & Idea to Life [15%]

03A.

Describe the creative solution and how it helped the idea break out of the category and resulted in unexpected solutions.

Hello Chocolate Lovers

While most chocolate brands chased novelty, discounts, or seasonal gimmicks, Whittaker's chose to slow down, and go deeper.

We didn't just launch a campaign. We launched a brand world.

‘Hello Chocolate Lovers’ was a strategic and creative reset: transforming Whittaker’s from a habitual treat into a badge of belonging for those who feel differently about chocolate.

Built from behavioural insight; the rituals, rules, and quirks of real Chocolate Lovers, the platform flipped the category norm.

Where others shouted louder, we whispered to insiders.

Where others sought mass, we rewarded meaning.

Where others flexed price, we built pride.

This wasn’t marketing for everyone. It was an invitation to the ones who already cared.

We elevated chocolate from a treat to a love language.

Every touchpoint, from film to packaging, from POS to Pods, became a mirror for the slightly obsessive, deliciously personal relationship people have with Whittaker’s.

And we did something category-defying:

We made Whittaker’s feel more premium without changing the product or jacking up price tags, just by showing people they’re not alone in loving it that much.

It created emotional pride, ritual recognition, and brand meaning in a space usually dominated by sugar rushes and seasonal noise.

Every execution, from brand films to packaging, digital, social, in-store and new product launches, carried the same intimate signature.

A confident wink. A whispered nod. A single line that made every message feel personal:

“Hello Chocolate Lovers.”

Not a tagline. A brand belonging cue.

The result? A chocolate brand that didn’t sell chocolate. It sold identity.

And in doing so, redefined what chocolate marketing could be.

Not for everyone.

Just for Chocolate Lovers.

03B.

WHAT WAS THE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY?

This section relates to the media and communications thinking and strategy that brought the creative solution to life in the most powerful and relevant way for the target audience. Include all significant touchpoints and channels in this section.

Outline the rationale behind your communications strategy. Explain how the key elements worked together to drive results:

‘Hello Chocolate Lovers’ was built with long-term brand building in mind: emotional world-building, behavioural truth, and product storytelling.

Every execution mapped deliberately to one of three layers:

1. Brand Layer: Ritual storytelling

We launched with films that turned intimate behaviours into cinematic love letters.

The Pantry Piece: A love letter to the piece that doesn’t count - eaten in the pantry, lights off, door slightly ajar. All Chocolate Lovers know the rules, the piece eaten in the pantry doesn’t count. That’s pure chocolate mathematics.

Whispered: A subtle portrait of chocolate loyalty. The final piece is whispered, not offered - a quiet act of selfishness every true Chocolate Lover understands.

The Moment: A visceral realisation that once you’ve tried a Whittaker’s flavour for the first time, you’re never the same. The moment before and the moment after are worlds apart.

Now’s good: Capturing that cheeky truth – Chocolate Pods are so irresistibly good, gifting it is as much about treating yourself as it is about delighting someone else.

Together, these stories elevated chocolate from a treat to a love language. They whispered to insiders while drawing outsiders in.

2. Product + Proof Layer: Sensory storytelling meets brand truth.

Each SKU got its own emotionally resonant campaign, blending functional superiority with wit and intimacy. Supporting our brand layer with digital films, outdoor, social and digital.

Each ad carried real product proof, ingredient-led, inclusion-first, sensory design, but told with wit, confidence and love.

“Hello Chocolate Lovers.”

Creamy Milk: *“The only thing creamier is cream.”*

Creamy Caramel: *“Good to the last drop.”*

Hokey Pokey: *“Packed with honeycomb. Make a beeline.”*

Coconut Block: *“It’s all you can coconut about.”*

The visual system signalled craftsmanship, not confection. Brought to life through slow motion, macro textures, and the sign-off:

“Hello Chocolate Lovers.”

3. Gifting Layer: Turning seasonal moments into self-serving love stories.

Gifting occasions like Christmas, Valentine’s Day, and Mother’s Day weren’t treated as seasonal add-ons, they became emotional peaks to amplify the brand’s romantic, obsessive worldview.

Whittaker’s Chocolate Pods were the feature format, designed to be gifted, and secretly kept.

The creative idea: when you really love Whittaker’s, gifting it is as much about treating yourself as it is delighting someone else. Deliciously self-serving.

We launched with ‘Now’s Good’ - a Christmas campaign that flipped traditional gifting tropes, showing that the best gifts are the ones you almost give away.

Seasonal campaigns extended this idea with witty copy, stylised displays, and one unifying truth:

“Whittaker’s is the perfect gift, impossible to give away.”

4. Experience Layer: From broadcast to belonging

This wasn’t just advertising. It was a cultural onboarding programme.

We designed an experience that inspired Chocolate Lovers to export our product to new Chocolate Lovers all over the world.

Experiential tastings invited superfans, creators, and retail partners into the Chocolate Lovers world.

The tone of voice extended to POS, PR, and digital comms.

Every detail was crafted to make Chocolate Lovers feel seen, and to turn occasional fans into lifelong evangelists.

Across every touchpoint, we weren’t just building awareness. We were building a brand world that people wanted to belong to.

List all supplementary communications touch points used in this campaign (the touchpoints that were not central to the campaign).

Website, eDM’s, Trade media

What was the \$ Spend? Outline the media and production spend on the campaign within the campaign period. Use actual spend rather than ratecard. In the case of donated media please list the rate card value separately from the paid media spend.

Media Spend	\$4,327,785 ²
Outline the media spend in relation to competition and versus last year	Whittaker’s had 34% of total chocolate category SOV from April 2024 to March 2025. ³ <i>Nielsen media reporting, total chocolate category.</i> And increased media investment by 78% YOY. From \$2,428,372 April – March 2024,

² Whittaker’s cost to client media spend, April 2024 – March 2025

³ Nielsen media reporting, total chocolate category.

	To \$4,327,785 April – March 2025. <i>Whittaker’s ‘cost to client’ media spend.</i>
Creative Production Spend	\$2,429,000

<h2 style="margin: 0;">04.</h2>	<p>WHAT WERE THE RESULTS? [20% for 4A and 15% for 4B].</p> <p>Outline the results achieved by the campaign against the short and long-term objectives set, provide conclusive proof that it was the campaign that drove the results.</p> <p>In this section, the judges will be looking to see a clear cause and effect between the communication activity and business performance over time. Show the compelling evidence that will convince even the most cynical finance director.</p> <p>Please Note: All results must be sourced to be judged; any unsourced results will not be considered by judges.</p>
<h2 style="margin: 0;">04A</h2>	<p>Overall achievement against objectives [20%].</p> <p>Clear proof that the objectives established in section one have been achieved. Judges will be seeking quantified results. Successful entries ensure that results can easily be aligned against objectives established in section one.</p> <p>Note: Please ensure all data is sourced, and is specific to the results period outlined in the Call for Entry, and geographically isolated to Aotearoa.</p>

Despite this environment the business found itself in,

Whittaker’s entered 2024 with a clear commercial mandate: grow.

Not protect, not hold the line, grow.

Even as prices rose. Even as premium shoppers started trading down. Even as cocoa costs spiked and the category got squeezed.

It was a year where FMCG brands pulled every classic lever: discounting, promotions, innovation at speed.

Whittaker’s didn’t.

We raised prices. We made fewer products.

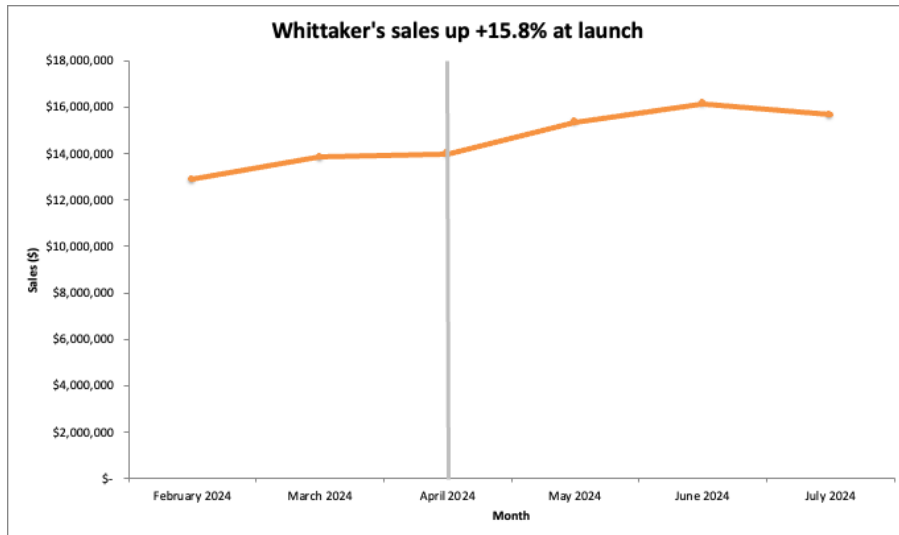
Hello Chocolate Lovers launched in May 2024 as more than a campaign. It was a strategic platform designed to build emotional connection, defend pricing power, and deliver commercial outcomes, all in a market running cold.

Objective 1: Drive brand sales growth in an inflationary, NPD-constrained environment.

Sales up +15.8% in the first 3 months post-launch.

From May–July, sales increased **+15.8%** vs the prior 3 months, despite unit prices rising **+5.6%** (Chart 1).⁴

Proof that emotional brand building, not price cuts, was doing the heavy lifting.



Objective 2: Maintain demand long term while increasing unit pricing.

Whittaker's grew faster than the category, while charging more.

From the launch of our platform, Whittaker's average monthly sales grew **+13.7%** versus the 12 months prior, outperforming the category's **+12.3%**.

We did this despite increasing unit prices **+17.0%**⁵, nearly double the category's **+8.1%** (Chart 2).⁶

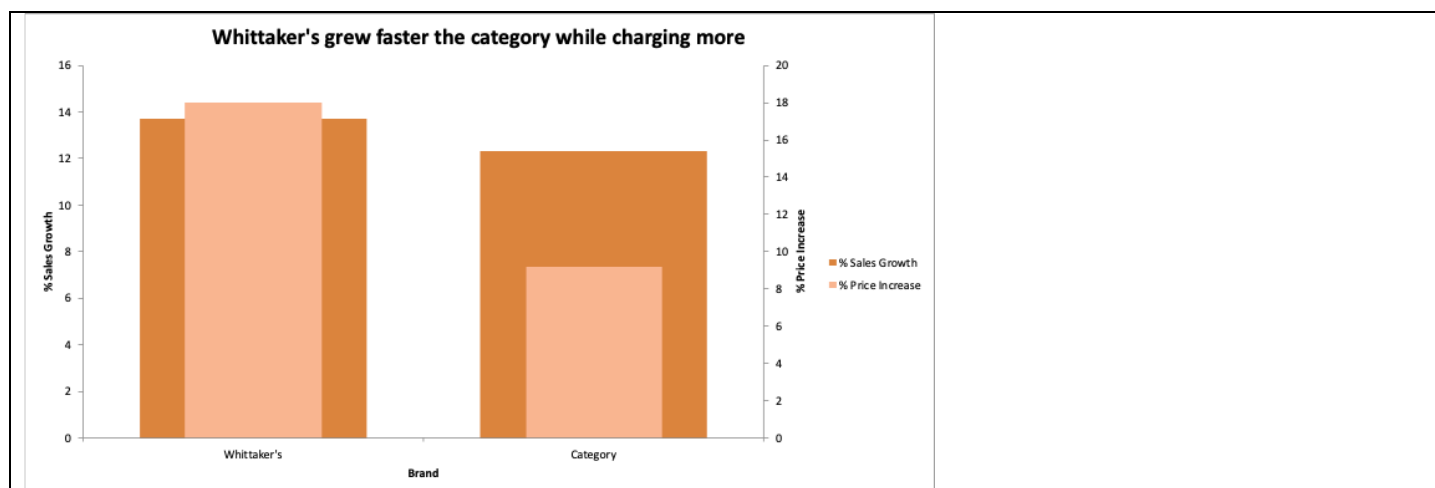
In other words: we didn't grow by costing less.

We grew by being worth more.

⁴ Whittaker's internal monthly sales reports (FY24/FY25)

⁵ NielsenIQ Homescan data, Chocolate Category, New Zealand, April 2023–June 2025

⁶ Whittaker's internal monthly sales reports (FY24/FY25)



Objective 3: Defend Block format performance with reduced NPD.

Block sales grew +13.8% per month.⁷

The 250g Block range, Whittaker's commercial core, lifted average monthly sales **+13.8%** per month vs the 12 months prior to launch.

This wasn't launch hype. It was compounding growth, with minimal NPD or promotional pricing.

In a category where innovation drives sales, and Cadbury launches constantly, Whittaker's grew faster, with less.

Objective 4: Grow high-margin formats, specifically 100 gram and gifting products.

Gifting up +24%. 100g up +19%.⁸

The formats most at risk of decline, premium-priced, high-margin, and highly sensitive to trading down, delivered standout growth post-launch.

100g Blocks, the brand's most margin-efficient SKU, lifted **+23.7%** in average monthly sales

Gifting, typically reliant on seasonal spikes, climbed **+19.0%**

In a cost-of-living crisis, these results weren't just strong, they were unlikely.

And they prove that brand love can justify premium spend.

Objective 5: Rebuild brand momentum, especially Preference.

Whittaker's preference climbed. The category declined.

Pre-campaign, Whittaker's preference averaged **55.8%**. Post-campaign, it rose to **57.2%**, a +1.4pt lift held across 9 months.⁹

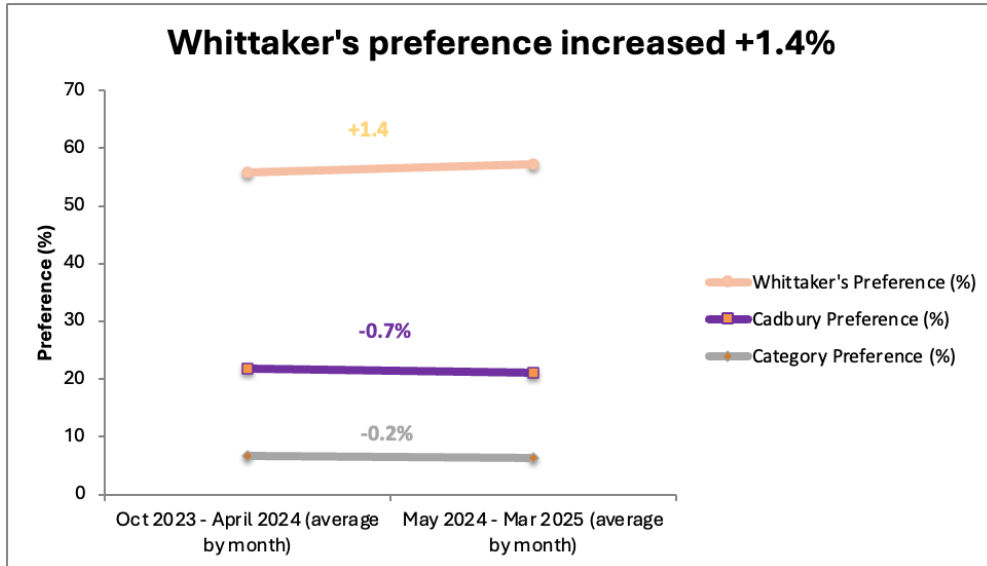
⁷ Whittaker's internal monthly sales reports (FY24/FY25)

⁸ Whittaker's internal monthly sales reports (FY24/FY25)

⁹ Tracksuit Brand Tracker – Monthly Report Q3 2023 to Q2 2025

Over the same period, Cadbury fell **-0.7pts** and the total category declined **-0.2pts**.

In a climate of rising prices, reduced innovation, and cocoa pressure, growing emotional connection wasn't expected. It was a win.



Whittaker's didn't just weather the storm. It grew faster, priced stronger, and outperformed the category, with brand, not product, doing the selling.

04B

Convincing proof that the results were a direct result of your campaign [15%].

Outline other external factors that could account for the results outlined in 04A and provide compelling evidence and rationale for why these did not contribute significantly to those results. There are almost always other factors that could have affected your results, such as product changes, pricing, distribution, stock levels, competitive activity, weather, etc. You need to convince the judges that these factors were not responsible for your results, or estimate their contribution and/or demonstrate how they needed the campaign to amplify their impacts.

This wasn't luck. It was brand doing the heavy lifting.

Let's consider the alternatives:

1. Pricing & Promotion?

Whittaker's raised prices +17%, nearly double the category. Promotional activity remained steady, no deep discounting or tactical spikes. In fact, category competitors ran more frequent promotions, giving shoppers every reason to trade down. Yet Whittaker's grew faster, proving this was value earned, not value engineered.

2. NPD?

Product innovation slowed due to cocoa cost. Blocks, our most mature, least innovated format, drove the growth, up +13.8% monthly. And gifting formats, typically seasonal and sensitive to spend, grew +19%. This wasn't predicated on new news. It was familiar favourites recharged through brand.

3. Distribution?

There were no major new doors, channels or physical availability gains. This wasn't the result of improved access. It was the result of improved meaning.

4. Competitor Weakness?

Cadbury's performance remained steady, albeit with heavy discounting. Other premium brands declined. The category was flat. If anything, this was a headwind, not a vacuum we filled.

5. Macro trends?

If premium confectionery had a tailwind, we'd expect category growth to lift with it. But the opposite happened. The market tightened. Shoppers traded down. And Whittaker's stood out for defying that norm.

In a cocoa crisis, with fewer innovations, higher prices, and no distribution boost, most brands hunker down.

Whittaker's went the other way.

We built a world around real Chocolate Lovers. We made them feel seen, understood, and proud. And they responded by buying more, more often, even at a premium.

This was not a convenient rise.

It was a deliberate one.

Delivered by brand.

	<p>Guidance Notes</p> <p>Please refer to the guidance notes below, to ensure your entry conforms to eligibility criteria.</p>
	<p>Eligibility: Data presented must be isolated to Aotearoa, and work must have run between 1 June 2023 and 30 June 2025. Results may be included up to 22 July 2025. Results data that fails to isolate or identify data specific to the eligibility period and/or Aotearoa New Zealand risks low marks and/or being ineligible.</p> <p>Data Sources: All data referenced in the entry requires sources (recommended as footnotes on the page referenced or at the end of the entry).</p> <p>Charts and Graphs: Entrants are encouraged to display data via charts & graphs within the limits allocated in each question. Sources required for all data including charts and graphs.</p> <p>Agency names: No agencies, of any kind, are to be included in the entry.</p>