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## Stationery is set to soar with Back to School sales

*Getting Back to School right is all about stocking a wide range of products – which includes items that moms would buy youngsters to inspire harder work at school; surprisingly good prices; in your face displays; and easy to enter competitions with nice prices.*

Stationery is Back to School (BTS) sales – and that's in January. For the rest of the year it achieves reliable, high margin turnover, offering shoppers top up products for school, office and home. Extra excitement is occasionally generated in this department with gift accessories, novelty crayons and pens, and kids' colouring and activity books.

But the annual transformation in January to a high traffic, fast turnover department is the true character of this department. There is, say some retailers, a mini BTS period in July, after the mid-year break, but it's minor compared with the January sales. According to BMI Research's AdSpend product, about R5.4 million was spent on promoting the category in January for BTS and about R1.4 million in July this year.

AdSpend analysed the promotional activity for the stationery category between January and July this year in all

### Get ahead of the January rush by offering a good range, exciting promotions and novelty ideas now

BY JANICE HUNT

chain retail and wholesale stores nationally. "An analysis of the stationery category highlights that spend for 2010 occurred only during January and July, with the majority at the beginning of the year. Most advertising is done in national publications, with a skew to Gauteng on individual provincial advertising. Makro and CNA are key groups for stationery, outperforming their counterparts in terms of spend," says the BMI report.

The ranking, based on advertising spend so far this year, shows where most of the focus is:

#### Top 10 stationery items

Ranking (based on 2010 ytd adspend)	Item
1	Pens / pencils
2	Exercise books
3	Files
4	Colouring pencils
5	Book wrapping
6	Paper
7	Pencil box
8	Paper adhesive
9	Dictionary
10	Stationery other

Interesting to note, too, is the promotional spend on this department per retail group, placing the huge value of the BTS period in perspective. See over for graph.

The fact is that stationery is a high focus department even though it's extremely seasonal, and it is steadily growing. Nielsen says that the stationery category has grown from 2008 to 2010 by 29% in value and 11% in volume. Through the recession

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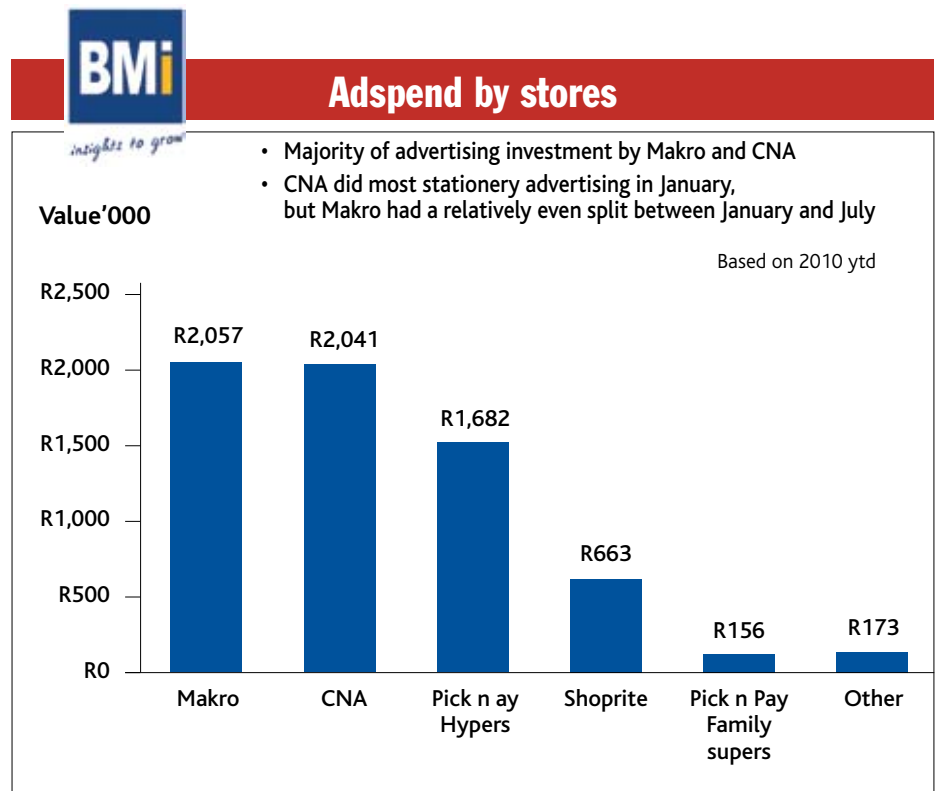
more South African children are going to school – and fewer schools are supplying anything in the form of stationery supplies.

Category growth does not automatically translate into easy pickings for retailers – it's a highly competitive sector and retailers have to stay on their toes to make sure they get a healthy slice of the BTS cake.

That's what makes this department so exciting, is Spar South Rand DC's BTS buyer, Morris Rantuba's opinion.

"We're careful not to change too much in our BTS activities because what we're doing is working; we just tweak our range and other facets of our activities a bit every year." One of the 'tweaks' this year is bringing the Back to School promotional dates forward a bit. Rantuba feels waiting until the start of January to get the BTS promotions rolling means missing out on some of the bonus money and Christmas spending frenzy. Before New Year is his plan for the start of the 2011 school year.

The range that South Rand Spar offers the 265 stores in its catchment area is about four times bigger than the normal stationery run, and it has to sell fast, he says. Excellent prices and the right range



- Majority of advertising investment by Makro and CNA
- CNA did most stationery advertising in January, but Makro had a relatively even split between January and July

is what works for them. Leaflets go out in their thousands, with many Spar stores ensuring that they reach local schools too. Spar also runs a competition for school kids across the board to enter, with appropriate and enticing prizes. Last year it was laptops, and the response was overwhelming.

Rantuba says this season's prizes haven't been finalised yet. The prize isn't the only factor that contributes to the success of competitions; it has to be easy to enter too.

This is true, according to HDI Youth Marketeers' newsletter, *10 youth trends for 2010*, produced early this year. "Young ►

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consumers want to feel in charge and they want to take control of their own experience. When it comes to entering competitions, teens and young adults are not looking for an adventure obstacle course – they want simple low-effort mechanics, so KISS (keep it simple, stupid).”

BIC also runs BTS consumer competitions each year to drive feet into stores.

Roy Naidoo, store manager at Bedfordview SuperSpar, is also enthusiastic about the BTS promotional periods. He notes that the mid-year mini-BTS run by Spar is a drawcard for the store and good for sales in this department. He’s delighted with the earlier start date for this end of year’s BTS activity. “Education is so important to every child. I’ve seen that many parents buy BTS products for their children rather than toys that won’t last two weeks.”

Naidoo says that at year end, several of the local schools send their stationery lists through to the store and they make sure that they have everything required in stock.

Keeping stationery moving through the year is also an ongoing focus, and Naidoo says using tactics such as hanging pencils or pens in the high impulse aisles like chips and snacks pays dividends.

Clever merchandising is vitally important in building sales in this department, agrees Millicent Quoilin, BIC South Africa’s trade marketing manager for stationery. She believes that shelves must be fully stocked daily because “a BIC seen is a BIC sold”. Stocking



*Showing gift options as well as adding a fun element into the department to keep pre-BTS sales moving with products such as brightly coloured crayons, tattoos and popular character colouring books.*



*It is important to always stock evergreen stationery products – notebooks, exam pads – that keep the department going between the huge end of year Back to School push and the mid-year mini nudge.*

branded products is also important, she adds, because the great variety of products on offer can see clutter building up in BTS departments. “Most consumers would buy a brand that they trust, which is good for BIC as it has been a brand that consumers have come to know and trust for quality and value over many years.”

Who’s buying BTS products? Moms and kids, with no-one offering a definite answer one way or the other. But, says Naidoo, even when it’s mothers, the children are invariably with them, voicing their own preferences quite strongly. Quoilin adds that for colouring products, moms are usually the ones who make the buying decisions. “Tertiary students decide on which pens fit in with their personal style, and for office use, secretaries – in most cases women – will make those buying decisions.”

HDI points out that smart brands recognise that many young consumers want to steer clear of the anxiety imposed on them by choice overload – so they’ll stick to the brands that they trust and provide them with brand-true simplicity and no-nonsense surprises. Whether the brands are products or retailers. It adds, “And while thinking out of the box is needed, there is a limit: young people expect the brand to remain true to its core brand offering – its true persona. If a brand deviates from what young people think it should do and tries too hard to impress them, they’ll ‘drop it and mock it’. So the best approach is to ask young people in the know before you roll out what you think is a great idea aimed at building sales.” ▶

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It's agreed then, getting it right in Back to School is stocking a wide range of products – which includes items that moms would buy youngsters to inspire harder work at school; surprisingly good prices; in your face displays; and easy to enter competitions with nice prices. Keeping the youth of today happy and hard at work is no easy game – but it's likely to be good for the bottom line.

### Do you know your BTS market?

Did you know that South Africa's 'tweens' (10-13 year olds) think that being an actor is the coolest job? Or that 86.4% of urban youth's top reason to save is to buy clothes? Or that our youth – about 25 million of them in South Africa under the age of 23 – have a direct spend of R6.7 billion a month? The answer is doubtless a bemused 'no' to anyone who's not a member of the youth generation, but they need to be understood. In fact, says HDI Youth Marketeers, they demand it.

In their newsletter, *10 youth trends for 2010*, HDI reviewed the trends it considered would play out among South Africa's sharpest critics – the youth – in 2010, and how brands aiming to impress them could live up to these changing expectations.

One of the most thought-provoking trends was for happiness. "In 2010 we will see a growing consumer consciousness geared towards achieving happiness. It will ultimately become a potent by-product of marketing strategies looking to engage coming-of-age consumers.

Brands that provide a channel to their own personal growth and happiness are going to have more appeal than brands that don't."

## Case study



## Pick n Pay's club is stealing young hearts – at school

*Angela Kay, head of PnP School Club, and marketing manager in the Group marketing department, holds a picture done for her by school kids who were delighted at the Club's input.*

Pick n Pay won the Coolest Grocery Retailer for the fifth year running this year in the Sunday Times Generation Next Survey of the 'coolest brands', which is based on a robust, national, quantitative research study conducted by HDI Youth Marketeers in conjunction with the Sunday Times. The survey clearly identifies what brands are sought after, since the youth are often the driving force behind opinion-leadership, new product trial and 'influence' purchases made by parents on behalf of their children.

This coup by Pick n Pay, says Angela Kay, who heads up the Pick n Pay School Club and is marketing manager in the Group marketing department, can be partly attributed to the Pick n Pay School Club that reaches 1.5 million youngsters and 70 000 teachers across the country.

The HDI newsletter, *10 youth trends for 2010*, explains it further: "Pick n Pay School Club has partnered with nine brands to conceptualise and create curriculum-aligned educational material that will be freely distributed to learners and educators across the country. In this way, brands are able to enrich the learning process of young South Africans and have a powerful (and relevant) impact in the lives of the future generation."

The Pick n Pay School Club has been running for about seven years – and it's a great success, says Kay. The idea stemmed from a need Pick n Pay had identified for greater involvement with schools, and more particularly, with school children as the shoppers of tomorrow. "It's not about selling the brand to kids. Kids invariably make up their own minds, and with them, hard sell is often 'no sell'," says Kay.

In fact, this trend – Human Touch – features in HDI's top youth trends for 2010. There is a "need for real human contact in a digitally connected world. In 2010 we see an extension of this into the service and retail industry. Young people are increasingly demanding of service providers.

The Club is about achieving big things, and its success probably relates to the fact that relationship building is not an objective; it's an excellent by-product of a single-minded and professionally managed effort to creatively supplement curriculum material for primary and high schools.

At this stage 2 010 schools from around the country are registered with the Club, with an average of 750 children per school. There are 823 government schools, 334 private, 821 township, and 22 farm schools. Any school can register with the Pick n Pay School Club by contacting them or through its dedicated and interactive website.

Each school receives a pack at the start of the year that includes theme-specific educational materials for teachers and kids to use in their lessons, educational quality posters that support the themes and booklets, learner recognition posters and stickers, a project registration form for teachers to complete and return to Pick n Pay after the material has been studied so the Club can assist with their school's projects during the year; and an overview brochure explaining all projects and opportunities for schools. Every year research is conducted with teachers and pupils to determine how well the material worked and what could be added or changed for the next year.

The future looks bright for the School Club: plans include continued steady growth in the number of schools serviced, as well as a concerted effort to reach rural schools, which need resources probably more desperately than most urban schools. "It is impossible to measure store traffic based on our activities, but the letters of thanks and the research results show that we are having an impact on our school kids' lives," smiles Kay. 