



The Inside Scoop

Evolving tastes and trends in
the ice cream category





The scoop of success

Ice cream has come a long way since it first arrived on UK shores in 1671. Back then it was a rare treat only the ultra-rich could afford. Today, it is enjoyed by millions of consumers from every walk of life.

In fact, more than 274 million ice creams were bought last year by over 21.6 million people, making the frozen treat a £605m industry in out of home.¹

And it's growing, driven by both penetration and price, spearheaded by QSR and multiples, with the latter seeing the fastest single growth in value (56.6%) and volume (36.5%)¹. So, there is still plenty of mileage in the ice cream van tank and new journeys to be had.

With that in mind, we bring you this specially commissioned research into how the market is evolving. We dive into which areas are the most dynamic, the products that are driving growth and the opportunities available to retailers and food operators.

Key figures are highlighted with insights and expertise from Nestlé Professional, providing an in-depth look at the trends and consumption occasions most prevalent within this growing category.

We are passionate about bringing our iconic confectionery brands into OOH desserts; and with ice cream being a top choice for consumers, we wanted to explore how operators can maximise the category. We hope this report is useful in helping your business to take advantage of the many opportunities the ice cream category brings.

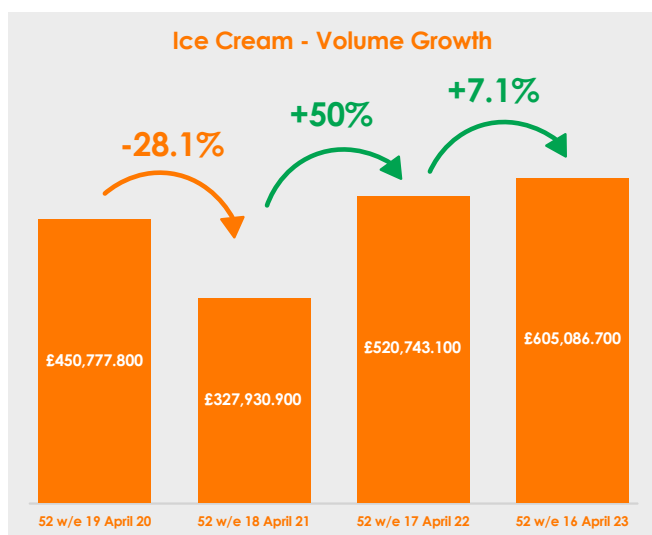
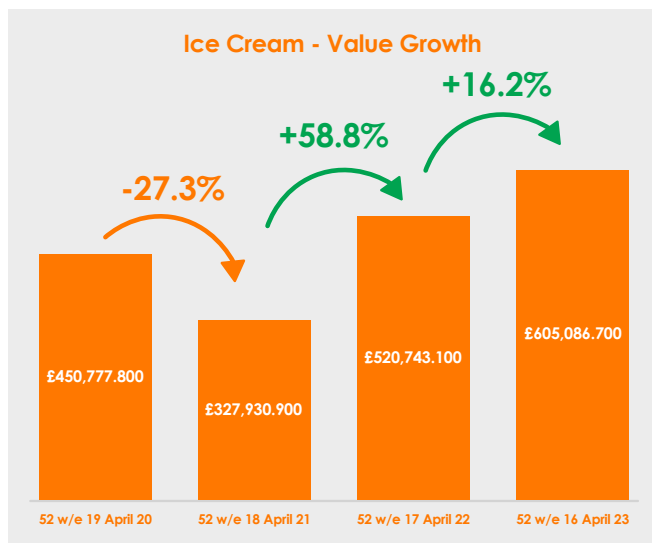


Danielle Griffiths
Desserts Category Lead
Nestlé Professional

The ice cream market is booming

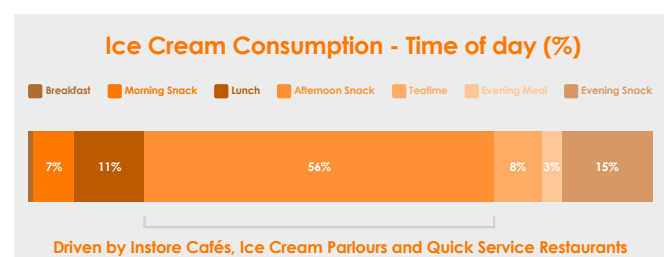
Ice cream has not only rebounded from its pandemic slump but has made significant gains. Category value increased by 16.2% last year, from 2022's £521m to an impressive £605m. Furthermore, volume growth is up 7%¹. This is faster than the total OOH Food & Drinks market which grew by 5.6% in volume in the same time period³. Spend per trip and penetration have both grown against all previous years. However, frequency has begun to drop back, potentially as a cost-of-living coping mechanism against price increases. This could also be attributed to a change in weather, with average rainfall in 2023 up by more than 11% across the UK.

When it comes to premiumisation, there are three main reasons that people would pay more for an ice cream when eating out: larger portion size (36%), something they can't create at home (30%), and presentation / appearance (29%)².



Prone as it is to seasonality, ice cream sales do, of course, melt away somewhat during the cooler months. However, the sector is not limited to specific consumption occasions. While it's typically consumed as an afternoon treat (56%)¹, it also has a place in consumers' hearts as an evening snack (15%) and at lunchtime (11%).

The variety of occasions at which ice cream is present has led to the consumption of almost 13 ice creams a year per shopper in out of home. This is driven mainly by instore cafés and ice cream parlours, along with quick service restaurants (QSR) and retail convenience¹.



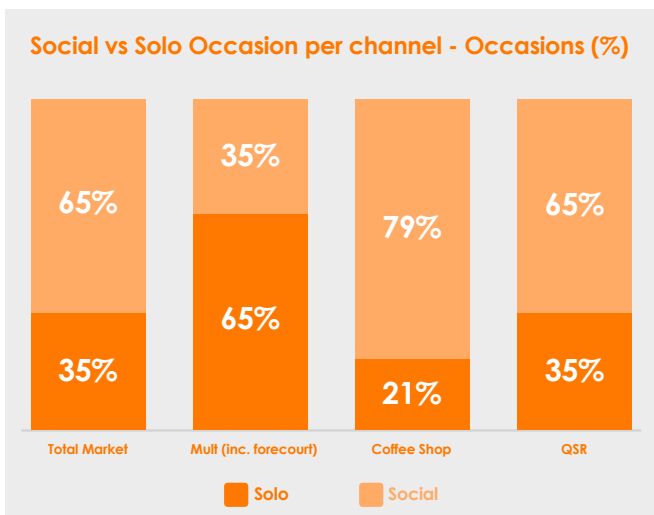


Enjoyment is the main reason why consumers choose to have an ice cream. They are driven by taste and a reason to treat themselves. 42% of ice cream connoisseurs indulge outdoors. 21% of ice cream occasions in out of home are because of the convenience of the category, as consumers have varied options and can often eat on the move.¹

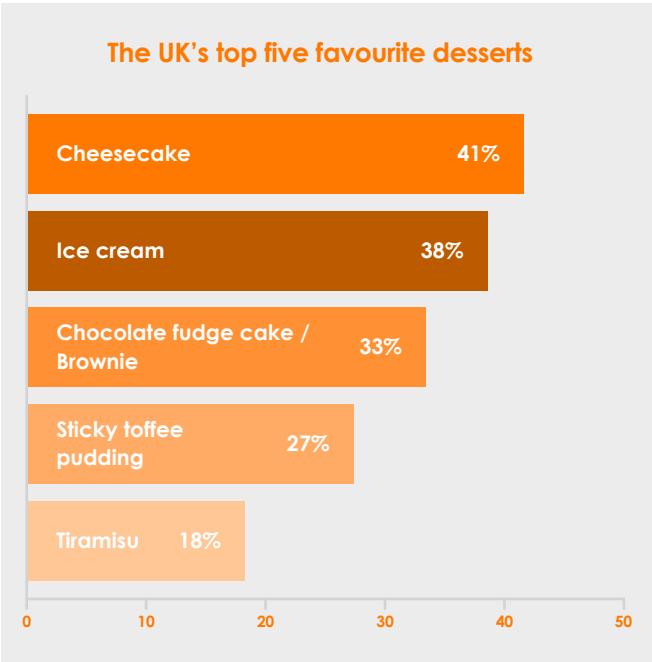
"Ice cream's versatility as a treat at any time of day, and its growing popularity as a sociable consumption occasion, have fuelled the recent category growth. There is an opportunity for operators to drive more ice cream consumption in those channels that are leading total OOH afternoon consumption – retail convenience (31% of occasions), coffee shops (14%) and QSR (8%)¹."

Danielle Griffiths, Desserts Category Lead
Nestlé Professional

Consumers are increasingly using the ice cream category to facilitate 'social moments', with group consumption increasing over 'solo moments'. Overall, 65% of the total market opt to join others when it comes to indulging their fondness for the frozen treat¹.

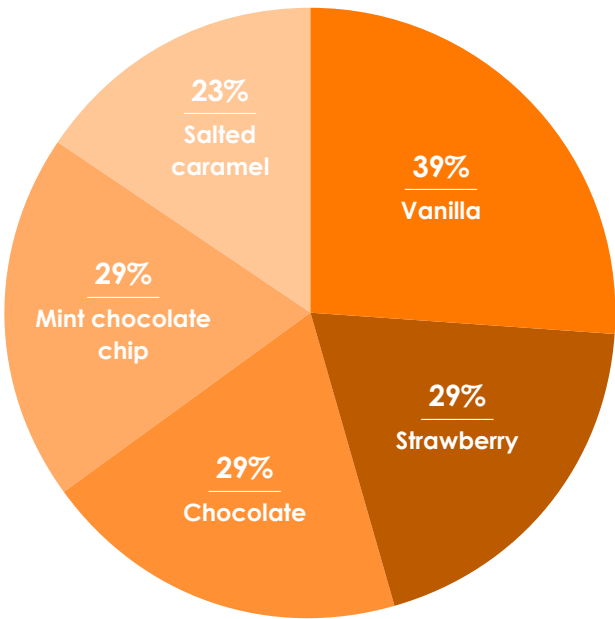


Consumers want personalisation



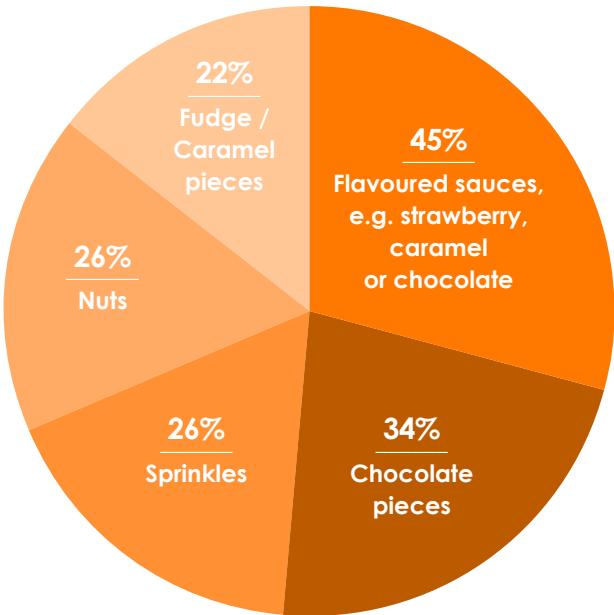
Among the UK's favourite desserts, ice cream takes the second spot in popularity when dining out, with 38% of respondents selecting it as their top choice.

Top five ice cream flavours among Brits:



When it comes to the way consumers like their ice cream served, top choices include scoops in a cone (52%), scoops in a bowl (47%) and ice cream sundaes (34%), but it's toppings that get the most thumbs-up. Nine out of 10 people (89%) say they like to embellish their ice cream with sauces, sprinkles, nuts and the like².

Top five ice cream toppings among Brits:



Gender and age differences

There's a difference of opinion between women and men when it comes to how they like their ice cream format. More than 3 in 10 (32%) female respondents prefer an ice lolly or stick ice cream compared to under a quarter (24%) of male respondents who said the same. The same percentage of women also prefer to eat ice cream alongside another dessert, compared to 26% of men.

Age also factors in when it comes to format. Almost 3 in 5 (59%) of those aged 55+ prefer ice cream in a cone, compared to just over 3 in 10 (31%) aged 16-24, who instead prefer scooped ice cream in a bowl (48%)².

TOP TIP

Ensure the nation's most popular toppings and flavours are always available, along with those you know your local consumers love, to keep them coming back for more.

"Toppings provide a great opportunity to delight consumers and to charge a premium. It allows for personalisation without adding too much complexity in the kitchen. It also gives consumers those Instagrammable moments to show off their choice to their followers."

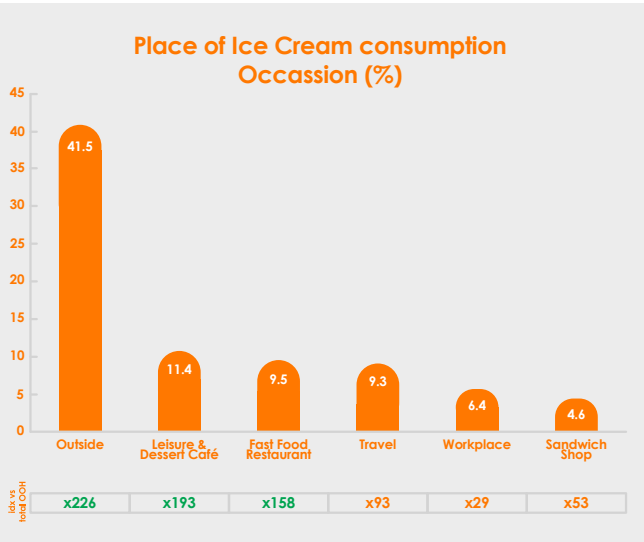
Danielle Griffiths, Desserts Category Lead
Nestlé Professional

"The pick 'n' mix idea has long been a favourite when it comes to confectionery and is gathering traction in the ice cream category. It creates an opportunity for consumers to interact more with family and friends and create their perfect personalised ice cream dessert."

Danielle Griffiths, Desserts Category Lead
Nestlé Professional

OOH consumption

Ice cream is the ultimate on-the-go treat, so it's unsurprising that almost 42% of consumption occasions take place outdoors. Other popular out of home consumption occasions include leisure and dessert café (11.4%), fast food restaurant (9.5%), travel such as airports and train stations (9.3%) and workplace (6.4%)¹.



UK consumers who have ice cream when eating out of home do so at a frequency of once a month (17%), with 15% consuming once every 3 to 5 months².

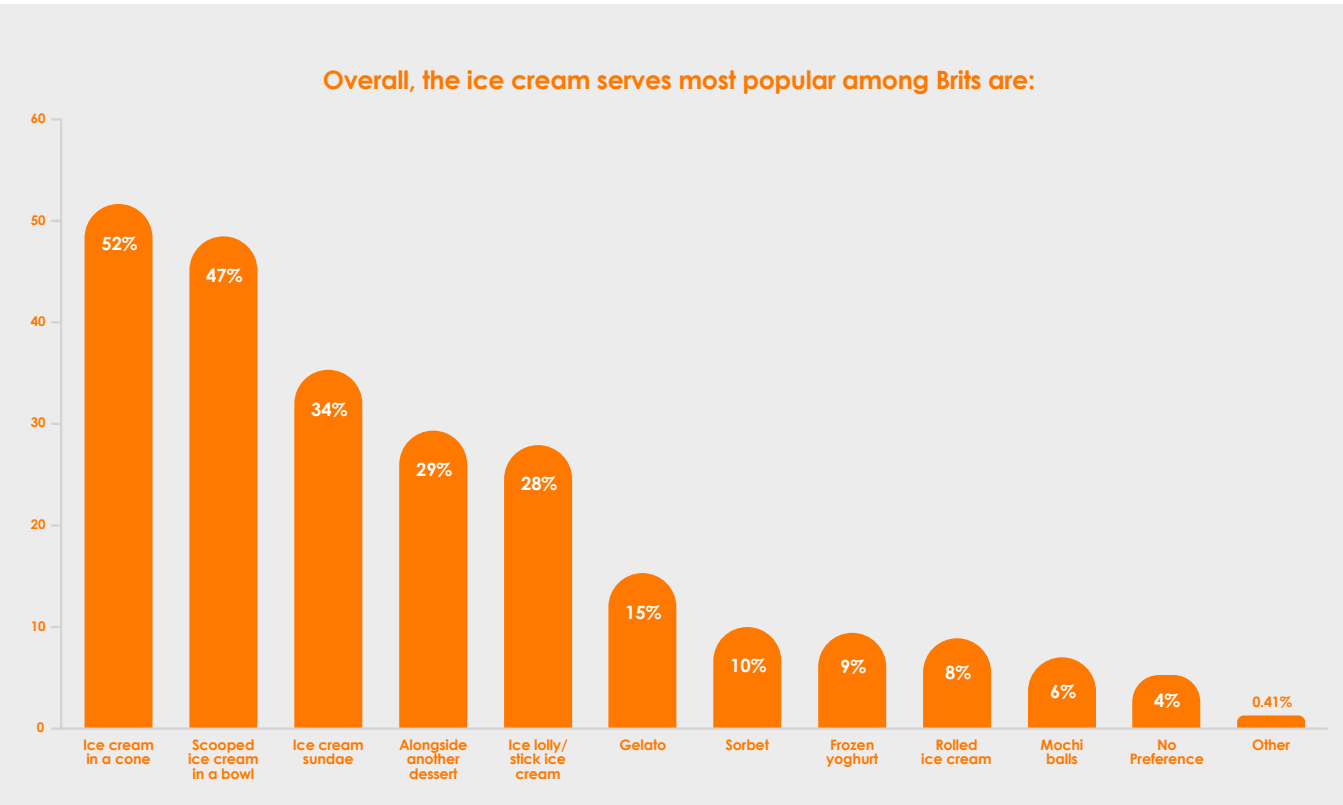


What and where?

Our survey confirms that, for those who eat ice cream out of home, scooped in a bowl is the most popular choice from a casual dining restaurant (23%), fast food restaurant (17%), café (18%), work restaurant and/or canteen (14%) and bar (10%).

Ice cream in a cone is the most popular choice to eat from an ice cream van (60%), ice cream parlours and/or gelato shop (26%) and as a takeaway option from an out of home establishment (16%).

At the pub, the preference is for an ice cream sundae (16%) or scooped ice cream in a bowl (16%)².



Sustainability

As consumers become more engaged with the climate crisis, they have higher expectations of the credentials of their food and drink choices. This is also true when it comes to ice cream, with 1 in 8 (12%) of our respondents saying the sustainability of the restaurant they are eating at, its sourcing and/or ingredients are important factors in deciding where to purchase from. Just over 2 in 5 (41%) said sustainability is a factor in their decision-making process. Younger consumers are more concerned with sustainability – the majority of those who cited sustainability (22%) as an issue are aged 25-34, while just 1 in 20 (5%) are aged 55+².

Responsible indulgence also plays a role in consumption. The offer of health-conscious options is important to 36% of Brits when considering the sustainability of a restaurant. 13% of consumers would also be willing to pay more for an ice cream if it offers improved nutritional credentials or caters to varied diets, such as low sugar, vegan and gluten free². This figure is expected to increase in the coming years as health continues to become more important to consumers.

"Ice cream's popularity as an on-the-go treat, as well as a favourite dessert for a sit-down meal, means it is increasing its market share of social occasions over solo occasions. It's the combination of personalisation and convenience which make it a leader in the desserts category."

Danielle Griffiths, Desserts Category Lead
Nestlé Professional

"Consumers, especially those in the younger age brackets, are today much more environmentally conscious with a desire to bring about change. It's therefore understandable that sustainability has become an important factor in deciding where and what to eat."

Danielle Griffiths, Desserts Category Lead
Nestlé Professional

TOP TIP

Highlight your sustainability efforts, outlining the steps you are taking in terms of sourcing ingredients to help gain consumers' trust



Brand power

Brands play an important role for consumers. More than half (57%) of ice cream consumers deem it important to see a brand name they know or trust as an option on a menu they are considering. 63% are likely to purchase if they see a familiar brand.

Over a third (36%) of those who eat out equate seeing a specific brand on a menu to providing a sense of familiarity and/or comfort. Trust in a venue is created by the presence of a brand for 29%. For almost a quarter (24%) of people who eat out, seeing a specific brand leads to feelings that the menu is of a higher quality².

63%

of consumers would be likely to purchase a branded ice cream

36%

of consumers say a brand creates a sense of familiarity and/or comfort

Brands have different levels of importance depending on the channel. QSR is a channel where they play a very important role and 79% of McDonald's consumers expressed a desire to see more confectionery brands on desserts¹.

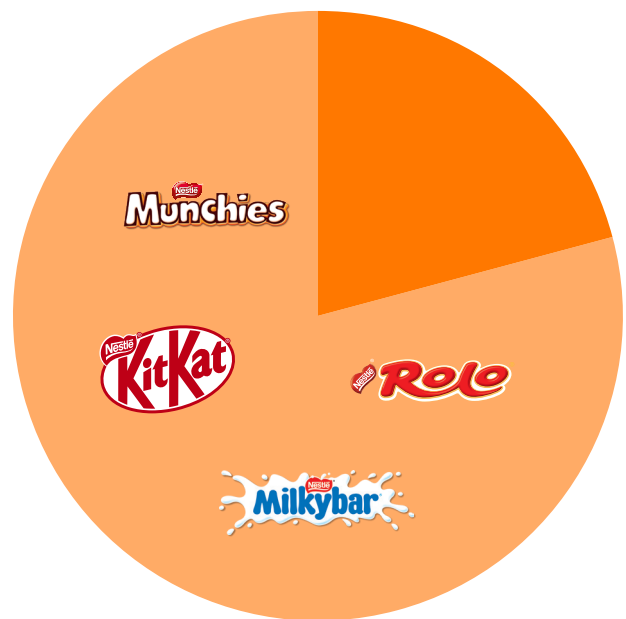
McDonald's have used several of our leading brands in its McFlurry range, including SMARTIES®, AERO® and KITKAT®.

When it comes to choosing desserts within QSR, flavour and value for money are the most influential factors. Chocolate is the consumer favourite in terms of flavour, followed by caramels.



TOP TIP

Brands build consumer confidence in an outlet. Keep them front and centre so they catch the eye of customers



79%

of McDonald's consumers would like to see more confectionery brands on desserts. 62% of total QSR consumers have the same preference.

"Consumers embrace the idea of choosing brands they know and trust when it comes to treats, even at a premium price, despite the cost-of-living crisis. They seek the comfort of familiarity, and they value the reliability that brands bring, particularly in those important moments of social connection with friends and family."

Danielle Griffiths, Desserts Category Lead
Nestlé Professional

"The power of the brand is synonymous with the ice cream sector, with 63% of Brits saying they would be likely to buy a familiar brand. This puts Nestlé products in a strong position as consumer perception of our leading brands is very high."

Danielle Griffiths, Desserts Category Lead
Nestlé Professional



National snapshot by region

While general trends occur nationally, Brits enjoy their ice cream slightly differently depending on their region. Differences may be attributed to economic factors or even small differences in regions on any given day, such as the weather. If operators have the inside track on their customers' preferences, they can offer more targeted opportunities for customisation.



On average, respondents in Greater London are willing to spend more on a dessert when eating out than those in the West Midlands

£6.08
v
£4.64

Over 7 in 10 (71%) respondents who have ice cream when eating out in Greater London think it is important to see a familiar brand name they know and/or trust mentioned on the menu, compared to just over 2 in 5 (42%) respondents in Scotland.

Over 9 in 10 (94%) Brits from Yorkshire and the Humber said they like to add sauces and/or toppings to their ice cream compared to over 4 in 5 (84%) Brits in the East of England who said the same.

TOP TIP

Get to know your local consumers. By offering a range of toppings and sauces, it will satisfy the consumers nationally, but also allow them to customise to their personal tastes.

Product Range

Combining our experience delivering successful collaborations in ice cream with our reputation as a global confectionery brand, our collaborations with McDonald's and KFC introduce exclusive branded ice cream offerings to UK QSR.

We also offer a range of off the shelf products which can be used by all customers; available in Booker, Amazon and a range of independent and national wholesalers.

Crafted with our popular confectionery brands, KITKAT®, ROLO®, MILKYBAR®, AERO® and SMARTIES® each product is quality-assured, thoughtfully portioned and guaranteed to deliver a delicious taste experience.

Guiding towards balance

At Nestlé we're committed to bringing tasty and balanced diets within reach for billions today and for generations to come. We work with our partners to help guide consumers towards balanced consumption, through responsible portion sizes and clear nutrition information on pack or menu.



Launched in 1936, MILKYBAR® is the No.1 white chocolate brand in the UK and Ireland. It's creamy and delicious flavour is enjoyed by generations!

Brand Value: £90M¹



AERO® is all about bubbles and is one of the UK's much-loved chocolate brands. Made with aerated milk chocolate, AERO is designed to melt effortlessly in your mouth.

Brand Value: £110M¹



The delicious balance of chocolate and wafer makes KITKAT® a globally loved brand. The iconic brand is a renowned symbol for enjoying a well-earned break.

Brand Value: £288M¹



SMARTIES® is all about releasing the fun and colour. Made of smooth milk chocolate and covered in colourful crisp sugar shells, SMARTIES® has been delighting consumers since 1882.

Brand Value: £63M¹



ROLO® is a delicious combination of smooth chocolate and slow-melting caramel. It is well known for its iconic strapline, "Do you love anyone enough to give them your last ROLO?"

Brand Value: £16M¹



Ice cream is a much-loved and evolving category which has seen dynamic growth over the past year. We've highlighted the main trends driving the category along with the opportunities available to retailers and food operators to maximise sales.

We're continually tracking trends; spotlighting tasty treats that satisfy consumers' needs as well as the businesses that serve them. And we're keen to keep on exploring new collaborations, so we can co-create exciting products that delight customers in out of home.

We hope this report supports your continued growth over the coming year, and we'll continue sharing insight to help our industry keep on creating delicious treats for consumers.

To hear more about our latest dessert innovations, sign up to our newsletter here:

www.nestleprofessional.co.uk/food/dessert-ingredients/newsletter-signup

Find out more:

www.nestleprofessional.co.uk/food/dessert-ingredients/enquiry

