

What Tony's Chocolonely wants to achieve

adapted from an article by Jessica Brown



- 1 In 2005, Dutch journalist Teun van de Keuken took himself to the police and asked to be arrested, hired a lawyer to help send him to jail, and asked a judge to convict him of driving child slavery. In an attempt to get more attention he even went to West Africa and brought back a former child slave 14. Much to his disappointment the judge wouldn't convict van de Keuken, because his crime was eating a chocolate bar.
- 2 Then Teun van de Keuken decided he'd try to stop child slavery from the inside instead, and set up a chocolate company – Tony's Chocolonely – dedicated to eradicating it from West Africa, where 70 per cent of the world's cocoa beans come from. The brand is now the Netherlands' favourite chocolate company, and enjoys 20 per cent of the market share. Tony's is expanding to UK supermarkets, and hopes to shake up the chocolate industry here, too.
- 3 "We're not a chocolate company, we're an impact company that makes chocolate," says Henk Jan Beltman, the company's chief chocolate officer. Beltman flew in from the Netherlands for the brand's UK launch, which for a few weeks in March, enticed people off the streets and into a Soho venue under the guise of free chocolate. These people are then shown a video about child slavery in West Africa and told there is no such thing as free chocolate. This tactic is a long way from the press stunts of founder van de Keuken. However, the brand has been consistent in putting the messaging before the chocolate.
- 4 "We have to prove to our competition and to governments that you can make tasty chocolate and be commercially successful while eradicating slavery from the value chain. And sometimes this goes very much in the opposite direction of our ideas of commercial success," Beltman says. The

organisation has five cooperatives in the Ivory Coast and Ghana, with whom it works to ensure its cocoa is segregated at every point in the supply chain to ensure it's as close to slave-free as possible. Tony's pays farmers a living wage by taking into consideration the size of their family and their farm, and adding a "Tony's premium" on top. This is the most crucial part, because it's widely established that child slavery is driven by low wages and poverty, says Dan Morey, head of commercial partnerships at Fairtrade.

- 5 The price of cocoa on the world market is instable, and in recent years has dipped as much as 40 per cent. "When this happened in Holland we ended up paying more to pay the difference, because we'd never want to profit from a drop in price of cocoa – and we want all companies to do that," Ben Greensmith, Tony's UK Country manager explains. The largest chocolate manufacturers, however, seem more interested in keeping the price of cocoa down, he adds, and Tony's wants to show them that another way is not only possible, but profitable. This isn't the only part of the market that needs to change, Greensmith adds, because UK retailers heavily promote this chocolate, meaning UK consumers are accustomed to paying so little for it.
- 6 Overcoming all of this will be tough, Greensmith admits, but he argues there is no better time than the present – particularly because there's such an appetite, particularly among younger generations for knowing exactly what their money is being spent on. "Ethics and fair trade isn't always at the top of shoppers' minds, but we've seen how this understanding can grow. If you can get that understanding there, consumers really do want to act on it. They have a huge part to play in eradicating child slavery, but can only do this if the options are there. We want people to accept that chocolate is a luxury, and to pay more for it."
- 7 Tony's ambitions are commendable, but Morey takes a more realistic approach to the impact Tony's can have in the UK. "We're excited to be welcoming Tony's to the UK, and it's joining numerous successful brands with a similar stance, including Divine and Ben and Jerry's," he says.

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