Unilever, Netflix, Tesla: Everything that matters this morning

Good morning and welcome to Marketing Week's round-up of the news that matters in the marketing world today.

By Marketing Week Reporters

2022 saw highest number of shop closures in five years

2022 saw over 17,000 shop closures in the UK, the highest figure in five years.

Around 150,000 retail jobs were lost as a result of the 17,145 shop closures last year. This figure represents a 50% increase on the 2021 number. In 2022, around 47 shops closed for the last time every day, according to the figures from the Centre for Retail Research (CRR)

The analysis from the CRR suggests many of the closures were down to businesses making strategic decisions about the future of their retail sites, rather than whole companies going bust. Only around a third of closures were due to companies going out of business, finds the research.

The number of shop closures which were due to businesses with 10 or more shops going under actually fell last year. These types of closures were 56% lower in 2022 than in 2021 but included high profile names including Joules and Sofa Workshop.

Companies deciding to close certain branches while retaining others, which is classed as "rationalisation" by the CRR, made up around one third of the closures. Independent shops deciding to close up shop is also classed as "rationalisation" and made up over one in three of the closures.

"Rather than company failure, rationalisation now seems to be the main driver for closures as retailers continue to reduce their cost base at pace," says CRR director Joshua Bamfield.

Tesla reports record number of cars delivered in 2022

Tesla has reported it delivered 1.3 million cars in 2022, which it says is a record number and 40% more than in 2021. However, its delivery figures for the fourth quarter fell below Wall Street estimates.

In its fourth quarter, the company delivered 405,278 vehicles; however, Wall Street predictions had been that it would deliver 431,117 vehicles in the period. In the final three months of 2022, Tesla produced approximately 34,000 more vehicles than it delivered.

In the past, this had been rare for the electric vehicle brand, which often reported an equal or greater number of vehicles delivered than it produced until recently. In its third quarter 2022 it produced 22,000 more units than it delivered. In October 2022, CEO Elon Musk had said he was working to resolve this issue.

The brand will announce its fourth quarter financial results later this month, as it faces the challenges of a tougher economic environment and other entrants to the electric vehicle market, from start-ups to legacy car manufacturers.

Tesla went public in 2010, and in 2022 saw its worst year yet on the stock market, with shares falling by 65%.

Netflix predicted to lose 700,000 UK subscribers in two years

By the end of this year, Netflix will have lost 700,000 UK subscribers in the space of 24 months, predicts research firm Ampere Analysis.

According to the analysts, the streaming service lost 500,000 viewers in 2022, even as it launched an ad-supported service in a bid to retain customers at a lower price. It is predicted to lose a further 200,000 this year.

According to the research, it will have seen its UK user base drop from 14.2 million to 13.7 million this year. It is predicted that Netflix will return to growth in 2024, in line with the UK economy.

It will take some time for the company's ad-supported tier to pay off, finds the analyst company. It predicts Netflix's subscriber numbers will be boosted 4% by 2027 through the initiative.

Ampere Analysis estimate that Amazon's Prime Video streaming service grew its UK base slightly from just over 12 million to 12.3 million accounts in 2022. Disney+ was the only major streaming service to make significant gains, and is predicted to add 1.4 million subscribers, taking its UK base to 6 million in 2023.

Unilever, HSBC and P&G accused of exploiting 'loopholes' over Russia

Unilever, HSBC Holdings and Procter & Gamble are among a dozen high-profile multinational companies which have been accused of failing to properly exit Russia by a recent report from a think tank.

The Moral Rating Agency was founded by businessman Mark Dixon last year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and is designed to call out corporate behaviour and hypocrisy on this issue. A recent report from the organisation names a "dirty dozen" of well-known multinational businesses who are still heavily involved in the country.

FMCG giants Unilever, P&G, PepsiCo and Nestlé all make the list, as well as banks HSBC Holdings and Goldman Sachs.

The think tank's founder Dixon claims big companies "often get credit before they have left" Russia, and says some pledges which have been made mean very little in practice.

"Some company announcements are not worth the paper they are written on," Dixon claims. "You read the statement and it sounds like the company is doing something real – but often it is just a promise that the company will be able to tear up."

The MRA is calling for the companies it has listed to be boycotted in 2023.

Compare the Market is renowned for its use of meerkat brand characters such as Aleksander and Sergei, who have been starring in ads since 2009. However, in its latest ad the price comparison site has introduced a wombat to the fold.

In its latest 'don't wombat it, meerkat it' ad campaign, created by VCCP, viewers are introduced to Carl, Aleksander's Australian nephew. In the ad, the wombat character is shown immediately creating chaos when he arrives at the airport.

The ad is designed to encourage consumers to "be less wombat and more meerkat" by making informed financial decisions.

"We're delighted to welcome a new character to the meerkat family, the loveable, well-intentioned yet hapless Carl," says Compare the Market marketing director Kristin Sonfield. "We all have those relatable wombat moments where we don't get it right, despite our best intentions!"

Carl made his TV debut on Boxing Day and the campaign will run for 12 weeks across various channels.