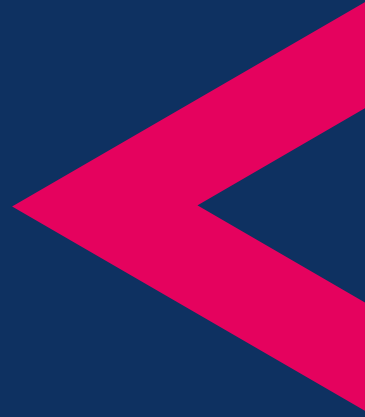


How to land a cost price increase – and what to do if the buyer says “*no*”

Practical guidance for commercial,
revenue, category & pricing teams

Index



01. Introduction

Cost price increase conversations are more contested, more complex, and more commercially sensitive than ever.

In 2025, persistent cost inflation is clashing with tougher buyer scrutiny and slower approvals. Retailers are pushing back harder, demanding more evidence, more justification, and greater trade-offs. And with market share fragmenting across channels, the context around every ask is shifting fast.

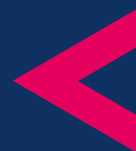
CPI planning is no longer a tactical task – it's a strategic event. One that requires cross-functional alignment, sharper positioning, and data that can stand up to pressure.

This playbook is built to help you lead that process with more confidence. It brings together practical guidance from former retail buyers, sales directors, and commercial negotiation experts to support every stage of the CPI journey – from alignment and scenario planning to submission, negotiation, and post-decision tracking.

You'll get clear frameworks, commercial prompts, and a checklist to help you pressure-test your plan and avoid common blind spots.

Use this guide to strengthen your next submission and improve your chances of getting it over the line.





02. Your CPI roadmap



02. Your CPI roadmap



Stage 1: Situation analysis

- Review the key drivers prompting the CPI (including commodity shifts and beyond)
- Align on core team members and meeting cadence
- Clarify objectives, CPI history, price elasticity, and budget parameters
- Conduct SWOT analysis of the latest CPI to assess what worked and what needs to change
- Review and challenge customer sell-in stories and their impact on the promotional plan
- Assess profit pool dynamics over the last 3–5 years (where data is available) to understand how value has shifted across the chain – from suppliers to retailers to consumers. This helps frame the CPI within broader commercial context, highlighting whether margin pressure is intensifying, stabilising, or creating opportunity. Anchoring your ask in this wider profit story improves cross-functional alignment and strengthens early strategic thinking

Outcomes



- **Aligned senior team**
- **Defined starting point**



Stage 2: Preparation

Deploy the CPI process using the TNG 10-step Kaleidoscopic approach, including:

- Define objective ranges by customer
- Identify new variables and assess the balance of power
- Evaluate the retailer's perspective and P&L implications
- Develop a pre-conditioning plan
- Conduct risk assessments for each scenario
- Align on stance plans for each scenario with measurable execution plans
- Complete the PARTNER model for each customer

Outcomes



- **Negotiation plan prepared**
- **Team trained and aligned**



02. Your CPI roadmap



Stage 3: Internal alignment

- Host executive kick-off to align on key questions and responses
- Finalise internal and external communication strategy
- Define internal sign-off and escalation processes to maintain alignment across all functions
- Complete sign-off packs by customer, including:
 - 3 offer options
 - FAQs
 - Opening, Discussion, Endgame (ODE)
 - Best alternative to negotiated agreement (BATNA)
 - Stance plans
 - Completed Plan on a page (POAP)
 - Weekly alignment meetings

Outcomes

→ Process completed with fully signed-off plans



Stage 4: Trial run

- Run negotiation trial sessions using known customer tactics
- Identify and address any preparation gaps
- Refine objection handling language
- Review content and positioning with Finance and leadership
- Provide 1:1 coaching to each negotiator to reflect on what worked and what could improve
- Build confidence across the team by ensuring readiness and senior backing

Outcomes

→ All plans reviewed, tested, and refined



02. Your CPI roadmap



Stage 5: Execution

- Deliver real-time support during and after negotiations
- Collate and communicate negotiation status updates across stakeholders
- Support escalation conversations as needed
- Manage last-minute challenges calmly to ensure teams follow the agreed plan, not reactive fear
- Issue weekly scorecards with customer status updates, supported by the Partner App

Outcomes

→ Team fully supported to execute negotiations



Stage 6: Review & analysis

- Share the first written review following Stage 2
- Conduct a consolidated review after Stage 4, including 1:1 coaching debriefs
- Complete financial analysis of final outcomes vs the original ODE plan
- Run stakeholder surveys to gather key learnings
- Facilitate group feedback and strategic reflection
- Use insights to inform planning for the next cycle

Outcomes

→ Clear, objective review of outcomes and learnings



03. Building your submission



Landing a CPI: Buyer do's & don'ts

We engaged a panel of dozens of buyers from right across the industry and here are their 3 do's and don'ts

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Provide as much detail and transparency as you can✓ Show the steps you have taken already to mitigate cost in your business (CPIs should be the last resort). For example, evidence logistics savings, production efficiencies, packaging changes etc.✓ Come with a plan that helps the buyer justify the CPI internally - e.g. how will they mitigate volume impact or maintain price competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Give too little notice or set unrealistic expectations Dropping a CPI with minimal lead time or expecting immediate agreement creates friction from the start. Buyers want a heads-up, not an ultimatum.✗ Lack detailed justification or transparency Vague claims about rising costs won't cut it. If you can't clearly link input changes to SKU impact, buyers will question your credibility - and reject the ask.✗ Fail to show how the buyer can defend the CPI internally If your proposal leaves the buyer exposed in internal meetings, with no volume plan, no promo offsets, or no category angle - they're far less likely to back it.



These points reflect what buyers say actually influences outcomes during CPI discussions. In a high-stakes environment where trust, credibility, and preparation are scrutinised, clarity and a collaborative mindset can be the difference between a flat rejection and an agreed increase.

Justification

Getting the CPI approved starts with how well you justify it. But in today's market, that justification needs to do more than show rising input costs, it needs to be commercially convincing.



Retailers are no longer accepting pass-through logic at face value. They want to see the impact through their lens: shopper behaviour, category performance, margin mix, and market dynamics. Screenshots and inflation tables won't cut it on their own.

This section shows how to build a stronger story - one that moves beyond raw cost data to demonstrate credible retail impact.

We'll cover:

- How to structure your justification around value, not just cost
- Which data sources carry weight with buyers
- Why visualising impact matters more than referencing external reports

Done right, this becomes the backbone of your submission - and the first line of defence if challenged.

“

Buyers will want to see your CPI as being grounded in fact and necessity in order to help them sell the CPI internally. Clear, credible and unambiguous data and candour in the conversation are therefore critical in offering this reassurance. Buyers will not always agree, and they will almost certainly look for a counter argument but facts and openness fuel a much easier conversation than secrecy and fête à complis.

Ross Watson – COO at Brand Nudge, Former Senior Buyer at Asda



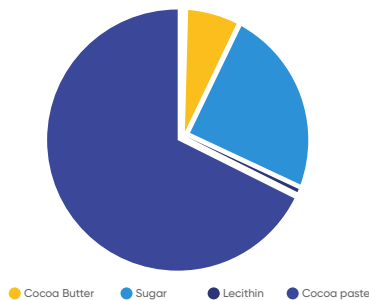
”

Justification – Do ✓

Cocoa price
£ per tonne



Dark chocolate



What has changed?

What is the commodity/Market shift/Input Cost/Internal Business Change/Strategy Shift that necessitates the CPI (this doesn't have to be external cost justified but needs to be compelling)

How does that affect the sku/range/business?

What is the impact this change has upon the business with the retailer (e.g. if Cocoa pricing has gone up, what % of the cost base of skus does this make up?)

What does this mean for the retailer?

What does this mean for the costbase for the retailer or what is the change that is being implemented?



Tool tip

When justifying a CPI, aim for clear, traceable evidence that connects the cost pressure to your ask. Use visual data where possible and quantify the impact – retailers are more likely to engage when the numbers tell the story.

Justification – Don't

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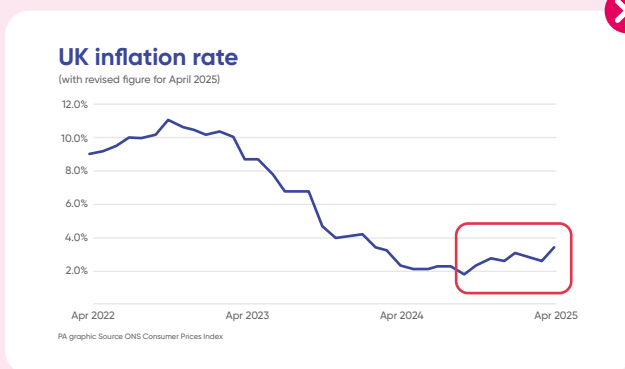
UK inflation rate: How quickly are prices rising?



Top stories

- LIVE** Reeves to set out spending plans with more cash expected for housing and the NHS
10k viewing
- Reeves's spending priorities leave little wiggle room
12 hours ago
- Seventeen police officers injured during second night of Ballymena violence
13 minutes ago

More to explore



- >
- Buyer has seen this same slide dozens of times
 - Implies you're only asking for a CPI because everyone else is
 - Generic material implies a generic CPI ask – appear methodical and calculated

ROYAL ASCOT FREE £2 SHOP BET WITH William HILL SEE PAGE 24 THE ONLY TERMS APPLY BEGINTUASHERE

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FREE PREMIER LEAGUE FIXTURES GUIDE
YOUR 4-PAGE POLLUT INSIDE

'Tough times ahead' as Bank fights to 'squeeze' inflation

SHOCK AS FOOD PRICES TO SOAR 15%

By Sarah O'Grady Social Affairs Correspondent

FOOD prices are set to rocket by 15 per cent this summer, industry leaders warn. Soaring inflation and a real fall in wages could see a family of four's typical monthly shopping bill leap from £396 to £459. One Cabinet minister warned of 'tough times' ahead and Bank of England chiefs raised interest rates to get the sequence on rising prices, adding hundreds of pounds

YOUR TO PAGE 4

Kate's mission to keep kids safe
SEE PAGE 11

Permissibility

Even a well-justified CPI can be rejected if it doesn't feel commercially reasonable to the buyer. That's where permissibility comes in. This section is about making your ask harder to dismiss by showing how it stacks up against what's already moving in the market.

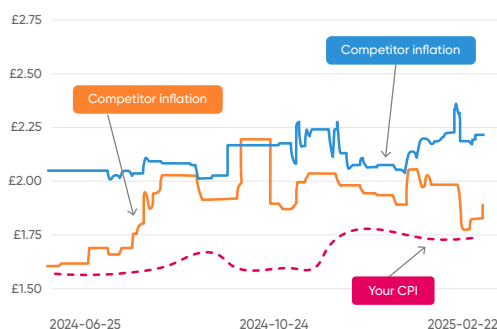


Use real pricing data to demonstrate that your CPI is in line with, or below:

- Competitor inflation
- Category-level inflation within the same retailer
- Private label price increases
- The retailer's existing price advantage on your range

When a buyer can see that your ask is consistent with market movements and won't leave them exposed on price – it becomes far more defensible. This isn't about softening the ask. It's about giving the buyer the evidence they need to say **"yes"**.

Price Trend



Inflation comparison

Top movers

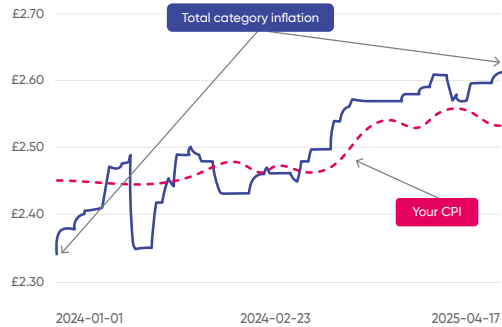
Competitor A	+6.2%	↑
Competitor B	+8.7%	↑
Your CPI	+4.6%	↑

Chart 1:

Show how your CPI is below competitor inflation (where possible)

Permissibility

Price Trend



Inflation comparison

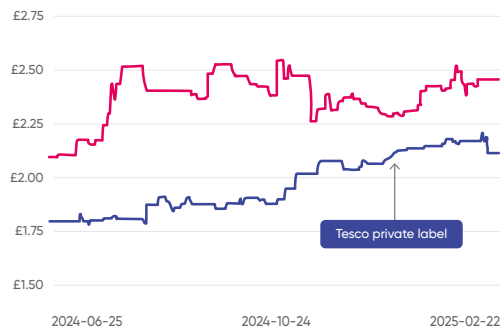
Top movers

Tesco total chocolate	★ +7.3%	↑
Your CPI	+4.6%	↑

Chart 2:

Show how your CPI is below the total category inflation within the retailer (where possible)

Price Trend



Inflation comparison

Top movers

Tesco private label	★ 24.6%	↑
Your CPI	★ 22.5%	↑

Chart 3:

Show how your CPI is below the inflation the Retailer has put through on Private Label

Basket analysis

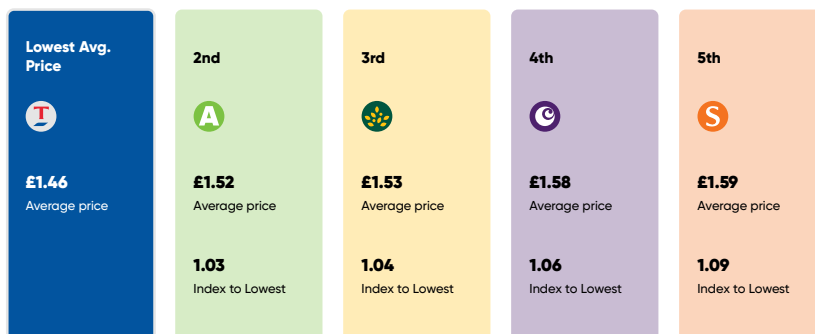


Chart 4:

Show how the retailer already holds a price advantage versus competitors on your assortment (where possible)



Tool tip

Use credible impartial industry sources where possible: Mintel Data, Stock Market Data, Financial Times
Try not to use: Statista, Tabloid sourced articles, unchecked ChatGPT material.

Enablers

Even with strong justification and solid permissibility, some CPIs need more to get over the line. Retailers are under pressure too – on volume, margin, execution, and space – and they'll often need something in return to justify saying **"yes"**.



This section is about shifting the conversation from cost to value. What can you offer to help the buyer defend the CPI internally and deliver a win across their category? Whether it's funded promo support, exclusive NPD, marketing investment, or operational levers, what you bring to the table matters.

We break it down into four core areas:



Promo levers to protect volume and create standout activation moments



Range levers to support exclusivity or rationalisation agendas



Media & marketing levers that boost visibility and engagement



Operational levers that unlock efficiency and ease commercial friction

Used right, these aren't trade-offs – they're tools to help you shape a CPI proposal that feels commercially sound and retailer-relevant.

“

Crucial in our approach is to clearly illustrate the profit opportunity that exists as a system margin, and then demonstrating how the customer benefits from the added value created. This value is not necessarily limited to profit (in both its percentage margin and cash margin sense) but also reinvestment to drive category growth.

Bernhard Wessels – Chief Solutions Officer, Total Negotiation Group



”

Enablers



Buyers want a defence against accepting the CPI – what can you give them to help them win internally. How do you make accepting the CPI a win for them, their category and their retailer?



Promo levers

- Increased funded weeks on deal
- New multi-buy offering greater value & protecting volume
- Market leading promo (depth or duration) – an event the buyer can point to internally
- Increased promo support for execution (off-shelf/event space/FSDUs, etc)



Range levers

- List exclusive/first to market NPD (helps drive urgency to agree CPI as first customer to agree can get this)
- Agree to remove tail skus to help buyer's rationalisation agenda
- Co-collaboration on exclusive variants/flavours for next Range Review



Media/Marketing levers

- Increased retail media investment
- Exclusive activations (e.g. competitions, Gift with Purchase (GWP))
- Increased online spend/online exclusives (e.g. Branded shop/landing page, exclusive rich content, etc)



Operational levers

- Extend payment terms
- Explore Full Truck Loads/Logistics efficiencies
- Shorten order times (e.g. move from D1FD3 to D1FD2)



Strengthen your CPI case with daily retail insights

Track pass-through rates, benchmark competitor actions, and build a stronger business case.

04. The three lenses of a compelling CPI ask

To build a CPI proposal that gets taken seriously – and gets signed off– you need more than just cost justification. Total Negotiation Group frames this through three commercial lenses:

1

Cost Scope

Covers the raw input: commodity costs, inflationary pressures, and supply chain impact. This is where most CPIs start – but if it's the only angle you present, you risk being treated like a commodity.

2

Elasticity & Competitive Scope

Positions the CPI within the broader value of the brand—how brand equity, price elasticity, and competitive dynamics support the ask. This is your chance to show why holding pricing supports long-term brand and category value.

3

Activation Scope

Demonstrates how you're reinvesting to support growth. That could be through funded promotions, media support, or category-driving initiatives that benefit the retailer too.

The strongest submissions cover all three. Weak ones get stuck in cost alone – where buyers are most confident, and where Private Label sets the benchmark.

Your job is to shift the conversation from cost to value. That's how leading brands win.

05. What to do if the buyer says “no”



Internal alignment and scenario planning

“

The biggest mistake we see is going to the buyer without full alignment internally. If the business doesn't know where it stands – or how far it's willing to flex – it's already on the back foot.

Bernhard Wessels – Chief Solutions Officer, Total Negotiation Group



”

Effective CPI execution starts long before the buyer meeting. It requires cross-functional alignment, realistic scenario planning, and clarity on how far your business is willing to go.



Before any submission, teams should align around three positions:

Optimal

– your ideal outcome

Desirable

– what's acceptable

Essential

– your walk-away point

05. What to do if the buyer says “no”



These aren't just commercial guardrails – they're critical for managing risk and maintaining consistency under pressure.

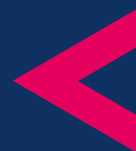
Practising delivery through role plays and CPI war rooms helps teams rehearse the story, anticipate objections, and build confidence in when to push, flex, or escalate. These sessions are key to building fluency across your commercial and leadership teams, especially when the stakes are high.

Account-level tracking is just as important. Your strategy with one customer depends on how others have responded, so knowing exactly where each conversation stands helps shape your stance. Without a shared, structured view, the toughest negotiations become harder to manage.

And when customers say “no” – as some will

– it shouldn't come as a surprise. Rejection, and even stop-ship scenarios, must be modelled in advance. What matters is that your teams know the risks, understand the thresholds, and move with intent, not panic.





06. After the CPI submission



06. After the CPI submission

Landing the CPI isn't the finish line - it's the start of the next phase. Once your CPI is agreed, you need to monitor how it's actually executed across retailers.

Has it been applied in full? Did it land consistently across banners and formats? Did all SKUs move? Was there a lag? And how does your new price point now compare to key competitors, private label, and across the retailer set?

This section focuses on post-submission tracking - giving you the tools to measure flow-through, understand competitive repositioning, and catch any execution gaps early.

With visibility on how retailers respond in real time, you can protect volume, react quickly, and flag risks before they turn into lost sales.

Because in today's market, getting the CPI approved is only half the job. **Making sure it delivers? That's the rest.**



Track retailer movements



Hi, Ross Watson!

Daily - 14 October 2024

BRAND
NUDGE



Base price increases

Retailer	Product	Pricing (Last 7 days)	Current price
T	Luxe Dark Chocolate Truffles 200g	£2.00	£2.45 ↑
T	Luxe White Chocolate Truffles 180g	£2.00	£2.45 ↑
T	Luxe Truffles Gift Box 600g	£5.00	£5.75 ↑

Be alert!

Ensure daily tracking of retail price & promotional moves in the category
- How are the retailers flowing your CPI to retail price and what does this mean for volume?

Brand Nudge does this for you with daily email alerts.

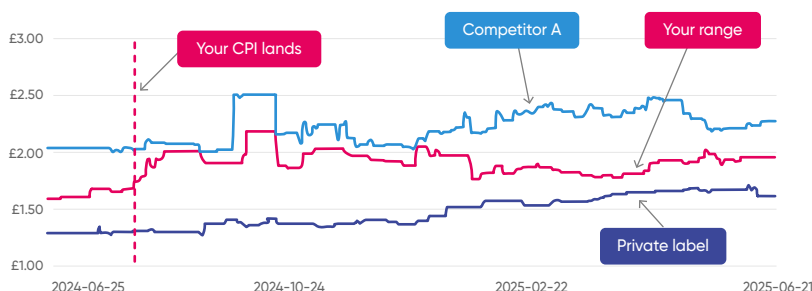


Understand how your CPI has flowed through to retail, and how competitor CPIs have impacted retail pricing:

- What does this mean for competitive positioning versus your competition?
- What does this mean for your pricing delta to private label - is this increasing or decreasing switching?
- What does it mean for the positioning of your various tiers within each brand - has this changed?

To understand more about how Brand Nudge places this data at your fingertips

Price Trend



Inflation comparison

Top movers

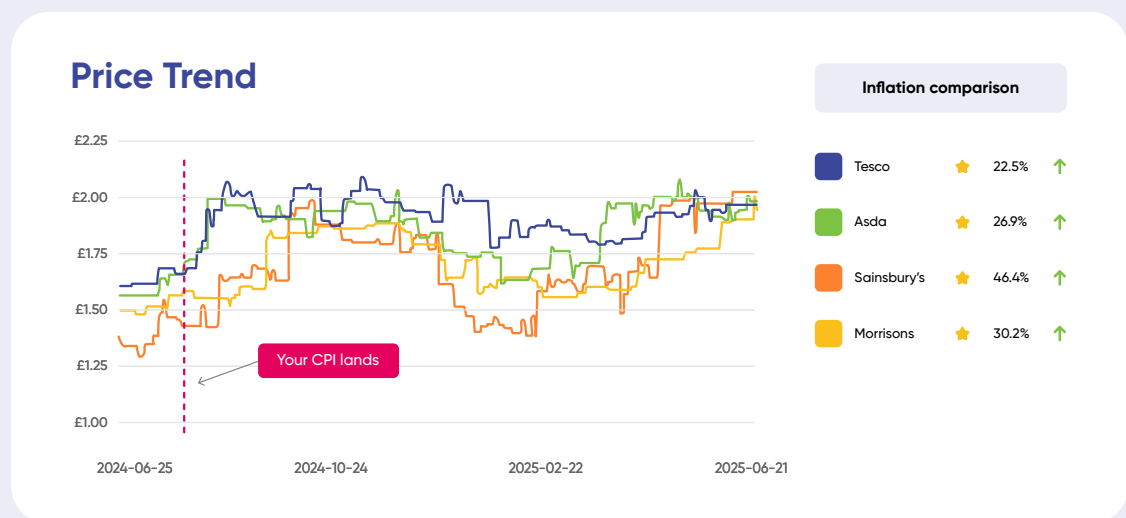
	Pre-CPI ASP	Post-CPI ASP
Competitor A	£1.34	£1.67
Tesco Stores Ltd	£1.06	£1.34
Your CPI	£1.54	£1.69

Retailer flow, timing, and inflation impact



Across the market understand:

How different retailers have flowed the CPI through and what this means for your competitive position across retailers



How the CPI has landed in market and how this affects your positioning against competitors

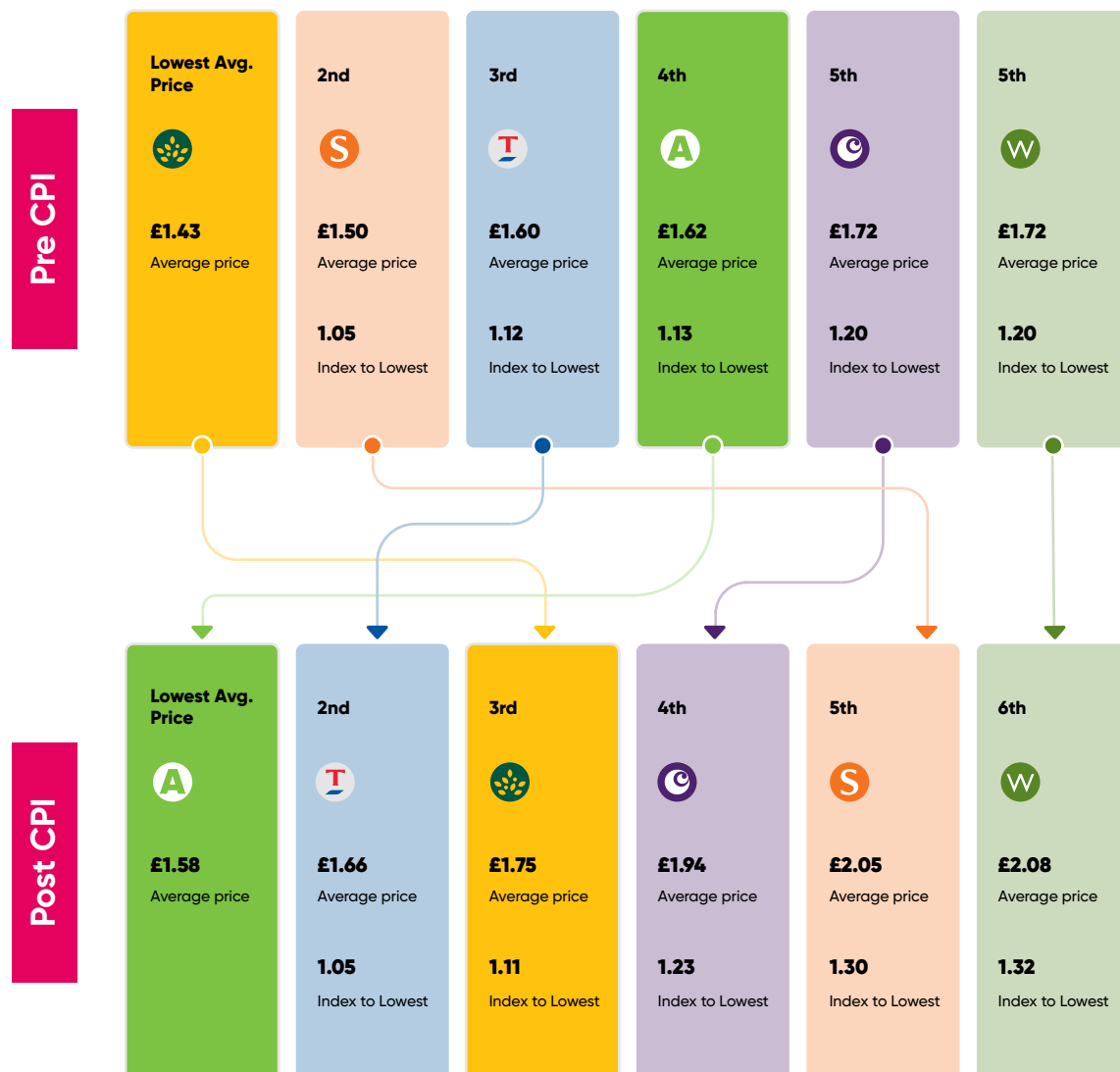


Retailer flow, timing, and inflation impact



How has the CPI affected your market readacross – does this still align with your strategic retailer priorities or could this cause you potential challenge from key retailers?

Basket analysis



07. CPI checklist

1. Internal alignment & scenario planning

- ✓ Have we aligned cross-functionally (Sales, RGM, Finance, Category, Supply, Leadership)?
 - ✓ Do we have clear Optimal / Desirable / Essential positions?
 - ✓ Have we modelled risk scenarios, including stop-ship and partial acceptance?
 - ✓ Have we run CPI role plays or internal war-room sessions?
 - ✓ Are we tracking the status of every customer conversation?
-

2. Justification

- ✓ Have we clearly shown cost inflation and its commercial impact?
- ✓ Is our story built around credible, up-to-date data (not just screenshots)?
- ✓ Have we connected cost pressures to retailer-specific dynamics (category shifts, shopper impact)?
- ✓ Is the submission framed to show broader category or store-wide implications?

07. CPI checklist

3. Permissibility

- ✓ Does our ask benchmark well vs. category, competitors, and Private Label?
 - ✓ Have we shown how our CPI sits within the broader retailer price landscape?
 - ✓ Are we moving the conversation beyond cost and towards market realism?
 - ✓ Have we used real-time data to prove this is a "reasonable ask"?
-

4. Enablers

- ✓ Have we included relevant commercial levers (e.g. promo funding, NPD, media, terms)?
 - ✓ Can we clearly show what value the retailer receives in return?
 - ✓ Are we offering enablers that match retailer priorities (efficiency, visibility, exclusivity)?
 - ✓ Do we have examples or precedents to support these enablers?
-

5. Negotiation & framing

- ✓ Is the CPI story commercially framed—not just cost defence?
- ✓ Have we prepared for buyer objections and mapped our responses?
- ✓ Is our team aligned on when to push, flex, or issue ultimatums?

07. CPI checklist

6. Post-submission tracking

- ✓ Are we tracking execution in real time across SKUs and retailers?
 - ✓ Can we see if the CPI has landed in full, or if there's been a lag or shortfall?
 - ✓ Are we monitoring changes in promo depth, pack strategy, or competitor moves post-CPI?
 - ✓ Are learnings being shared across teams to inform future asks?
-



Get a clear view of how ready you are to land your next CPI.

In this quick, no obligation session, a CPI expert will guide you through a few simple questions, highlight your biggest opportunities for quick wins, and offer tailored advice. You'll also receive a follow-up proposal if you'd like further support.

08. About the contributors

From Brand Nudge



> **Denis Murphy** – CEO, Former Sales Director at Mars

+22 years commercial experience at Mars, General Mills, and Heinz, leading the UK retail strategy across Tesco and beyond. Now CEO at Brand Nudge, helping FMCG brands turn pricing pressure into commercial advantage through sharper data and insight.



> **Ross Watson** – COO, Former Senior Buyer at Asda

8+ years of retail buying experience at Asda, leading Buying teams across Grocery, Impulse, and Beers, Wines & Spirits. Now COO at Brand Nudge helping FMCGs tackle pricing and promo challenges with data-led strategy.



> **Dee Oliver** – Head of Sales, ex-Nielsen & FMCG expert

+15 years of commercial experience, including senior roles at NielsenIQ and Groupon. Now Head of Sales at Brand Nudge, working closely with global teams to uncover pricing opportunities and strengthen retailer conversations.

From Total Negotiation Group



> **Bernhard Wessels** – Chief Solutions Officer, ex P&G & Kantar

+25 years of global experience in Consumer Goods, both as a practitioner and consultant. Joined TNG after senior roles at Kantar Consulting and Procter & Gamble across Africa, Asia, and Europe. Expertise in Digital Commerce, RGM, Category, and Route to Market.



> **Paul Hinson** – Head of Category, ex Colgate & Premier Foods

+18 years of FMCG experience across the UK, US, and Canada. Held leadership roles at Colgate Palmolive and Premier Foods. Expertise in commercial strategy, e-commerce, RGM, data analytics, and retail execution.



Brand Nudge → brandnudge.com

Power smarter CPI decisions with retail pricing and promo insights
– trusted by FMCG teams to track, justify, and defend their position
across retailers.

Total Negotiation Group → totalnegotiation.com

Powering supplier confidence across every commercial conversation.
Not just the final negotiation. Win more CPI conversations with
tailored FMCG consulting across category and channel, RGM,
planning, selling and negotiation.