Retail Innovation Shout Out: Kicking Around Innovation

by Traci Stapleton

Unveiled for the 2014 FIFA World Cup, the Brazuca soccer ball demonstrates innovation to an element often left untouched by other sports: the ball itself. The ball brings newness to the game not just in its look, but in its construction and performance.

The 2010 World Cup ball, dubbed the Jabulani, was blamed for flying erratically, being too light, and moving too fast in the air. The Brazuca promises improved aerodynamics with two fewer panels than the Jabulani, making its flight more regular and predictable (or straighter, at least). A soccer ball consists of the inner bladder, the carcass around that, the foam layer, and then the paneled or surface layer - and every one of the components can impact the functionality of the ball and its performance.

Adidas is going to market with the ball after a mere two and a half years of testing, making it the most tested ball ever produced. The ball was tested to stand up to FIFA's standards as well as Adidas' brand standards which require the ball hold up to wind, grass, rain, and even television presence. With scientific metrics and quality standards approved, the Brazuca stood the more critical test of the 600-some players that vetted the new ball through practices and games.

Adidas’ Director of Soccer Innovation Antonio Zea says of developing official match balls, “You’re trying to create newness in a product and have it be well accepted. You can change too much or not enough.”

Just like any other new product development, success in innovation is about finding that sweet spot that delivers on your brand promise and what your customers expect of you, while demonstrating authenticity and uniqueness with your product assortment.

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