

## MARKET WHISPERS

■■■ All kinds of fun goings on in St Petersburg last week, where Scottish & Newcastle and Carlsberg had gathered analysts to discuss its Russia beer giant BBH. First off there were the strange rumours regarding one analyst who had travelled back from a restaurant to her hotel on horseback – as you do. But perhaps the most disturbing news to emerge regarded John Nicolson, the chairman of BBH – and the fact that he was crowned Disco Dancing Champion of Kazakhstan last year. Apparently, drinkers in a bar were invited on to the stage

and asked by a local celebrity to compete for the title. And it was Glasgow's own Mr Nicolson who emerged triumphant. 'The Independent on Sunday' can reveal he will not be defending his title.

■■■ More and more consumers are keen to ingest bacteria, according to a report by Intangible Business, a brand valuation consultancy. Its *Most Valuable Grocery Brands* report lists Actimel, the pro-biotic, as the UK's fastest-growing brand. Intangible says Actimel's value has surged 48 per cent since 2003 to £195.5m. But it warns that competition is heating up with Müller, Ski and Yoplait competing for a share in the market for pro-biotics, which are potentially beneficial supplements containing bacteria or yeast. But

which brand gets the title of the UK's most valuable? It is, of course, none other than soft-drinks giant Coca-Cola, which Intangible values at £1bn.

■■■ If discussions that AXA is having with British small business owners are anything to go on, it appears an expanding European Union is not posing a threat to local industry. The European Commission is poised to reveal the timetable it will adopt for admitting Romania and Bulgaria to the EU this week. Research from AXA shows that competition from Asia, which can produce cheaper products, is of more concern. "They're not too scared about Romania and Bulgaria, it's China they are most worried about. It's

hard to outsmart cheap," said an AXA insider.

■■■ The charity arm of mobile phone giant Vodafone will announce this week that it will donate about £700,000 over the next five years to Telecoms Sans Frontières (TSF). TSF is a non-government organisation providing telecoms support to aid agencies in emergencies, for example providing support to the UN humanitarian mission in Lebanon in August. Vodafone Group Foundation is making the donation along with the UN Foundation, the charity arm of the UN. The money will support telecoms teams working together with children's charity Unicef and the UN. Vodafone reported profits of £8.8bn before write-downs last year.