



Fun Factor

Adding fun to healthy foods wins over kids and parents

Getting kids between the ages of 2 and 12 to eat is not always an easy task. And for some kids, getting them to eat healthy is another story altogether. What does this have to do with food processors? Quite a bit. Most know that kids have a huge influence on what parents bring home from the grocery store. And many have cottoned on to the fact that if you combine fun with healthy, you have a better chance of winning over both children and parents.

That's one of the challenges in making food fun for kids, says Janet Oak, vice-president of Strategic Planning at Stamford, Conn.-based Just Kid Inc., a child-focused marketing group that specializes in product innovation, brand positioning/strategy and all forms of child-oriented market research.

What may help food processors looking to launch healthier products for kids is Just Kid Inc.'s recent *FUNDamentals Study*. The quantitative study, which asked kids what makes food fun, found six main attributes:

- I can eat it with my fingers.
- I can take it with me.
- It comes in a fun shape or cool colours.
- I can dip or scoop it.
- It comes with things I can add to it myself (sprinkles, sauce or toppings).
- It has filling in it or frosting on it.

Just Kid Inc. has worked with many food manufacturers to help them understand what things kids consider fun. For instance, the company worked with Kraft Foods in the U.S. on revamping its Lunchables line. One of the results was Lunchables Nacho Cheese Chicken Shake-Ups, says Oak. The packaged lunch comes with seasoning packs kids can use to season the chicken as much or as little as they like. Just Kid Inc. also worked on a project for Kellogg Company, creating waffles that come in Lego-shaped pieces. The Eggo Homestyle Lego-shaped Waffles allows kids to "build with them, play with them and then eat them," says Oak, noting that kids don't want to be told what they'll like or how they'll like it. They want to be able to customize their own meals.

Attempting to combine nutrition and fun in kids' foods is another challenge that food processors and marketers are

increasingly considering, guided by a renewed emphasis on healthy eating and living. Often products don't require reformulating to make them healthy, but they may require marketing and packaging changes to give them kid-appeal.

Kellogg Canada uses specific resources to find out just what gives products kid-appeal. According to Casey Futterer, vice-president of Marketing, the company holds frequent consumer panels and conducts its own qualitative and quantitative research to determine what kids want. In addition, the company has a Consumer Affairs team that tracks consumer comments and conducts consumer surveys. Feedback it receives through its consumer product phone

line is also monitored.

For Kellogg, making kids' food fun goes back to 1933 when the company introduced the Rice Krispies' characters Snap! Crackle! and Pop! The cereal, introduced in Canada in 1928, appealed to moms for its health qualities, while the characters engaged their kids. "We know that children react positively to fun characters and packaging when choosing various food products. So we make sure that those things will appeal to them, while the product nutrition inside the box appeals to mom," says Futterer.

Challenges for food manufacturers include trying to innovate in crowded categories, such as in the fruit snack market, says Oak. Winning over parents is another challenge, especially as they tend to think in narrower terms of what their kids might like or dislike. "Kids actually have a much broader mindset in terms of what the possibilities are," says Oak.

Where manufacturers go wrong is in trying to remove fat, sugar or other ingredients from foods with long-standing kid-appeal, something that doesn't usually go over well. Instead, Oak suggests either launching a new product or a line extension, but to remember to start with a nutritional anchor, like milk or oats, and then build the fun and flavour into it. "The challenge for mothers is 'How do I get more vitamins and minerals into my kids? How do I get more vegetables and milk into my kids?'" says Oak. "So you're giving them a way to get these things into their kids in disguise."

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