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## Category Closeup

### Oral/Dental Care

#### Smile-worthy products

by Elizabeth Fuhrman

Beneficial sweeteners, well-known brands and innovative marketing give candy manufacturers an edge in oral and dental care products.

Cavity fillings and the occasional root canal often prompt recipients to search for a culprit to blame. Additionally, cigarettes, spicy foods and coffee drinks are also easy prey for bad breath. Confectionery products then become easy targets for consumers' haphazard dental practices. Candy marketers don't plan on taking the fall any more with the growing number of confectionery products targeted toward oral and dental care health and maintenance.

At the forefront of addressing dental concerns, xylitol, a sugar replacer or polyol, actually will prevent the bacteria that causes cavities to form. While the majority of consumers aren't aware of xylitol's benefits, confectionery manufacturers are doing their best to make the sweeteners beneficial properties known. Currently, very few products contain xylitol, and among those that do, very few actually make an effort to market the benefits of the sweetener, says Brent McKinley, v.p. of corporate development for Xlear Inc. in Orem, Utah.

"We make it very clear on all of our marketing material and product packaging that our products are sweetened with xylitol, and that the benefits include everything from fighting tooth decay to being safe for diabetics," he says. "The advantages of using xylitol as part of our brand will continue to grow as more people are educated on the benefits of using xylitol instead of other natural and artificial sweeteners...We are confident that as the understanding of the sweetener grows, the demand for xylitol-based products will increase."

Xlear's Spry Dental Defense System gums and mints emphasize the benefits found in clinical studies touting xylitol's ability to substantially reduce the occurrence of cavities and improve overall oral health when used in confectionery products. Additionally, studies have shown that xylitol inhibits the ability of bacteria to adhere to tissues in the mouth, nose and throat, which will reduce the possibility for bacterial infection. The Spry Dental Defense System gums and mints come in flavorful varieties that appeal to both adults and children.

"We are already seeing rapid growth across the country with people concerned about wellness and preventative health measures, especially when it comes to more natural alternatives," McKinley says. "As consumer demand for more healthful products increases, the food



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manufacturing industries, including the confectionery market, will increase research and development of these products and ramp-up production to meet the demands of a growing wellness-conscious consumer base."

Some companies like Los Angeles-based Tundra Trading Inc. go so far to market the use of xylitol in their products' name. Tundra's XyliChew begins with an expensive natural gum base of the sapodilla evergreen and uses xylitol exclusive as its products sweetener. XyliChew sugar-free chewing gums come in Spearmint, Peppermint, Fruit, Licorice, Chocolate and Cinnamon flavors.

Also expanding its flavor base and fan appeal, Listerine PocketPaks, produced by Pfizer Consumer Healthcare in Morris Plains, N.J., now is available in Fresh Citrus. The line extension offers a less intense citrus flavor that contains the germ-killing ingredients found in other flavors of the product. The ultra-thin starch-based strips contain essential oil germ-killing ingredients found in Listerine Antiseptic Mouthwash and dissolve instantly on the tongue allowing for discreet usage.

Listerine PocketPaks oral care strips were the first products that offers both portability and the germ-kill/ "Clean Mouth Feeling" of Listerine Antiseptic Mouthwash, helping them to maintain the product's popularity as other breath strips have faded away.

"While other breath strips may temporarily mask bad breath, Listerine PocketPaks oral care strips kill over 99% of odor-causing bacteria within 30 seconds based on lab tests, lasting up to 90 minutes," says Kristin Jones, a spokeswoman for the brand. "Listerine PocketPaks consumers are dedicated to the brand and more so to the product's germ-kill benefit..."

Listerine isn't the only brand focusing on combating the cause of bad breath. ElimiTaste Zapp and Smoke Screen sugarless gum, manufactured by Inhale Solutions Inc. in Las Vegas, work to neutralize taste and breath issues associated with smoking and eating strong spicy foods. No matter what flavors or specific consumer market, Inhale Solutions wants to conquer consumers looking to relieve bad breath from particular causes like smoking or onions.

"We felt like ElimiTaste was broad enough, but also clear enough, that we could actually go after individual market segments under that umbrella brand name," says the company's ceo Matt Willer.

Zapp with its first flavor Intense ElectraMint looks to capture the trend-conscious consumer that desires a strong mint gum but is also seeking a healthier gum. "Our products are probably some of the strongest on the market, but we're not just going for who can make the strongest gum or who can make the strongest mint," Willer says. " There are a lot of other pieces, if you will, that go into us formulating the product." Willer cites the benefits of using xylitol as the product's only sweetener as one of them.

The trend isn't just for stronger mints and gums in the marketplace, but for strong flavors in foods and drinks in general. Willer says the increased intensity results in consumers wanting stronger and stronger products to knock out the taste of other items they are consuming. Hence, Inhale Solutions plans to continue creating new products addressing the bad breath like the current one its developing for caffeine users.

Products that target bad breath aren't the only confectionery items attractive to consumers. Ford Gum & Machine Co. Inc., Akron, N.Y., offers peppermint-flavored Cow Power Calcium Chewing Gum. Each piece contains 250 milligrams of calcium, plus vitamin D to aid in

calcium absorption. Ford touts the \$.99-product as a convenient and easy way for consumers to get their daily requirement of calcium by chewing four pieces.

Targeted to women 35 and older and their children, women are told now to add calcium to their diets at a younger age. "Calcium pills are large and hard to swallow, so the idea of taking calcium in the form of chewing gum was so appealing to them," explains Laurie Lichko, director of marketing for Ford.

Ford, who also provides private-label manufacturing, has produced gums with functional ingredients ranging from herbal formulas to green tea and baking soda. As more Americans tend to rush through their days, barely finding time to even eat a healthy meal, functional gum marketers are hoping that the consumers will turn to their products as a convenient and practical option for improving their diets, Lichko says.

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