

# CATEGORY INSIGHTS

## A BREATH OF FRESH MINTS

*Made up of miniature yet powerful little pieces, the breath mint category just won't quit.*

BY RENEE MARISA KRUGER

Mature categories typically don't grow at a 65 percent growth rate, even after powerful new product innovation. And when they do, they can't keep it up forever. This is the recent tale of the mature breath mint category, which up until about a year ago, maintained a remarkable two- to-three-year growth period, peaking at 65 percent, according to industry statistics from IRI and ACNielsen. Then started the overall category downturn — identified as an inevitable and natural economic fate after such an unusually enormous high.

"It was over-steaming itself; it had to adjust itself somewhere," says Steve Schuster, president of Schuster Marketing Corporation, makers of Blitz Power Mints, based in Milwaukee, Wis. "Other related categories aren't going to allow it to continue to grow like that. That's when we got a lot of new innovation from the gum category, as well as from the creation of the new breath strip segment."

The down economy and the recent war played a part in the downturn as well. "There was a lot of tightening of the belts of candy buyers,"



relays Jerry Lessard, marketing director for Vitech America, based in Kent, Wash. "What also hurt us were the longshoremen that were locked out before last Christmas. Many of us had tins locked out in the water."

But the downturn refers to the overall breath mint category. What continued to stay up was the sugar-free sub-segment. According to industry statistics, mini sugar-free power mints were up around 40 percent last year; and the category



continues to be another booming one this year, perhaps even more so, thanks to product innovation that just won't quit.

New mints are spilling out from large candy manufacturers as well as small — everything from Masterfoods' new AquaDrops, positioned as hydrating mints that have the functional benefit of activating saliva and freshening breath, to Scripture Candy Inc.'s Scripture Mints, shaped like little Christian fish enclosed in tins that include one of 78 different Scripture messages printed inside the lid.

### Liquid assets

A new company — Yosha! Enterprises Inc., based in Westfield, N.J. was even created around a new mint concept — Momints, claiming to be the first liquid-filled breath mint and "the most visually appealing mint the world has ever seen," according to Anthony Shurman, president. "They look like jewels or translucent blue pearls," he says. "Some have even described them as blue caviar. Women have told me they've strung them together and made necklaces out of them."

As for the effect, Momints promise to deliver an extremely fast-acting rush of peppermint in seconds. "Buyers are looking at this as the next breath strip," claims Shurman. "It's technologically advanced in that the mints are seamless capsules, as opposed to two pharmaceutical halves. They're formed the way water drips out of a faucet and then hardened." Launched in New York City earlier in the year, Momints are now being rolled out nationally in retail chains such as 7-Eleven.

Another new mint on the scene truly has heart. Love Mints, in the shape of hearts, will be launched in stores for Valentine's Day 2004. The intent of Toronto-based Big Sky Brands, makers of the "hearty" mints, was to create a tinned power mint line that was specifically geared to the heart holiday.

"We wanted to create a mint

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product that was inherently Valentine's-specific, with a name that spoke to that and a brand image and product content that was specifically geared that way," says Steve Yacht, director of sales and marketing for Big Sky Brands. "We thought there was a gap in the market for something of that nature. We noticed that in the confectionery market in general, you find companies taking existing brands and products that don't necessarily have anything to do with Valentine's Day, and just wrapping it in Valentine's-oriented packaging or graphics."

The Love Mints are also shooting innovation into the category by mixing both peppermint mints (which are white) and cinnamon mints (which are red) in the same package. "It's a category first," maintains Yacht. "We know from focus groups that a lot of consumers like both peppermint and cinnamon, so by offering them together we're providing more value and convenience."

For the alternative channel set, Hint Mint, based in Los Angeles, has come out with its newest mint flavor — Classic Chocolate — which, like all the specialty mints in the line, is vegan and certified KSA kosher. With classic chocolate, the company is going for a little nostalgia. "This taste of chocolate and peppermint is reminiscent of a peppermint patty," says Sum-Sum Chan, director of marketing. It is packaged in a curved slide-to-open tin, adorned with gold and black 1920s designs.

Some existing mints have gotten better. Flip-A-Mint, available in peppermint, win-



tergreen, cinnamon and chocolate, has recently had a boost in strength and flavors. "The market warranted us giving more of a robust punch to the overall mints than we originally developed," says Stephen Wolff, president of Ovalette Brands, LLC, makers of Flip-A-Mint.

### Packaging creativity

Packaging innovation has made additional strong marks on the mint scene lately. Thinnie Tinnie is the brainchild of Vitech America, makers of Myntz! and Squintz! The new tin is slimmer than the original packaging, holding 30 mints or .71 oz, as opposed to 1.75 oz. "We wanted a tin that was more portable; something that people could slide in their pocket without the bulk of a big tin," says Lessard.

Also with convenience in mind, Perfetti Van Melle USA Inc., came up with new packaging for its Mentos brand of mints and candies. According to Steve Ferro, group brand manager, the company was looking to solve a consumer consumption problem. "The problem was consumers were consuming their roll of Mentos in less than an hour," he explains. "Their roll of Mentos never made it home from the store — it was usually consumed in the car, and they didn't have any Mentos for later."

The new Mentos box became the solution — it holds 70 percent more Mentos than the roll, but comes in a compact box with a reclosable locking lid. The way Ferro tells it, "For retailers it works great because now in the space of two Mentos roll flavors — typically Mint and Mixed Fruit — they can sell Mint and Mixed Fruit Mentos boxes PLUS our revolutionary new microgum" — but of course, that's another story.



And Ovalette's oval flat packs, found in its Flip-A-Mint brand, is now having great success in private label at a major mass market retailer. In fact, Ovalette has noticed a surge in the popularity and success of private label mints that use creative packaging, according to Wolff.

Beyond packaging, displays are giving mints additional boosting power. From Schuster Marketing Corp., comes the new Blitz Power Center, which the company says is the first of its kind in the candy industry, resembling a more upscale display that might have been created for the greeting card industry, for instance. It's an acrylic display with hologram labeling on it and casters for portability; it also boasts a back-up storage box on the bottom to provide extra storage capacity. Schuster supports the display with a merchandising team that not only re-shelves and restocks the display, but keeps it clean.

"There is a lot of unproven ground here," says Schuster. "There are not many off-shelf displays that hold these small adult count good items, like mints. We knew we could build one that was kick-but; it holds our entire line of product and creates a scenario for retailers that in one square foot of display space, there is well in excess of \$700 in retail sales."