

MARKETPLACE

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Liquid Mints Try To Freshen Up A Stale Category

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Dow Jones Newswires

NEW YORK—There is nothing faddish about wanting to have fresh breath. When it comes to deciding how to achieve it, however, consumers are rather finicky.

"Mints are a fad business," says Derek Schmitt, the confectionery manager for Dallas-based convenience-store operator 7-Eleven Inc. "You are always looking for the next thing to put it over the edge," he says. Witness the yielding of the Altoids craze of the 1990s to the popularity of breath strips such as Listerine PocketPaks.

Right now, things have become a little stale in the category, with sales of breath fresheners and breath strips on the decline.

Mr. Schmitt says he thinks he has found the next big thing to breathe fresh air into the category: By volume, tiny tubes of Momints liquid mints are outselling the competition at 7-Eleven stores, he says.

Created by Yosha Enterprises Inc., Westfield, N.J., Momints are small gel beads that are filled with a potent minty liquid. In addition to the eye-catching sample-size vials of eight sugar-free mints that are moving fast at 7-Eleven, Yosha also sells Momints in a flip-top pack of 36. The package design originally had smokers in mind, and its packaging still trumpets how easy it is to dispense Momints from a cigarette pack.

Momints founder Anthony Shurman started Yosha with the severance money he collected when he left the gum and mint division of Warner-Lambert after Pfizer Inc. bought the company in 2000. He began distributing Momints in New York by wheeling the product from convenience store to convenience store in a wagon.

But Momints have taken off from this humble start. After packs of the mints were placed in goodie bags at high-profile events such as the Sundance Film Festival, Momints gained a cult following.

The product's rising popularity hasn't been missed by larger rivals. Hershey Foods Corp. is rolling out its own liquid mint under its Ice Breakers brand, and Playtex Products Inc.'s Binaca has introduced its own version.