

Small Business PROFESSOR



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Breath mints for smokers: Packaging was key to success

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Anthony Shurman, proprietor of Yosha! Enterprises, Inc. and manufacturer of confectionary products including Morimints, a breath mint originally preferred by smokers, led an international life prior to landing in Westfield, N.J.

Shurman was born in South Africa while his dad was working for Coca Cola, and lived there for six 6 years, during apartheid. Shurman's parents, appalled by what they saw, tried to bridge the gap by interacting with many different races. His mother even translated a Zulu cookbook into English. From there, the family moved to Atlanta, Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, and, finally, to Miami, where he attended high school. Shurman says he was very lucky to have the opportunity to learn to speak five languages.

A semester abroad in Japan while attending Macalester College in St Paul, Minn., interested Shurman in making his living overseas, but going home to graduate with a degree in Japan studies in 1992 delayed that step.

Taking some time off before he began his professional career, Shurman moved to Aspen, Colo., to work as a ski instructor, but soon realized he wanted more. Back again to Japan, he got an internship with Warner-Lambert, a company that makes confectionary products (including Trident, Dentyne, and Certs). With his background, he was able to jump rungs on the corporate ladder and by age 24, became a brand manager and launched a brand of chewing gum in Japan.

This experience helped him get into Northwestern University's J.L. Kellogg Graduate School of Management, from which he received an MBA in 1998. After graduation, he re-joined Warner-Lambert in a New Jersey-based program sponsored by the chairman of the board to groom young candidates for upper-management positions. When Pfizer bought Warner-Lambert, Shurman was offered a promotion to stay, but he decided to take a generous severance package. That gave him part of the capital to start his own business.

Shurman came up with an idea for a breath mint product that capitalized upon the heavy cross-usage of smokers and breath mints and chewing gums, and started writing a business plan. His idea was to create a breath mint convenient for smokers to carry along with their cigarettes. The key was to design the mint packaging to slide inside the cellophane of the cigarette wrapper. The height of the dispenser allowed smokers to remove mints and cigarettes without separating the packages from each other. This unique package design could increase usage of mints from every seven cigarettes to every three cigarettes. Multiply this by the billion cigarettes smoked per day, and you get an idea of the potential market size.