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Taste Strips Give Ads a New Flavor

Welch's Inserts Juice Purchase Consideration, Awareness -- Even if People Don't Try Them

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By Natalie Zmuda

NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- Remember the one about the "lickable" ad?

It garnered millions in free publicity for Welch's and the company that provided the technology, First Flavor, when they teamed up on a two-page insert for People magazine's Feb. 18 issue. Everyone from Diane Sawyer to Al Roker was talking about it, making it seem like the latest fad.

Sold your tongue: Study finds 59% of those who licked strip were more likely to buy.

But a study conducted by Starch Communications, a division of GfK Custom Research North America, indicates that the Peel 'n Taste flavor strips -- edible strips of film -- are raising awareness and increasing purchase consideration with consumers -- at least, those who are brave enough to try them.

The study, commissioned by Time Inc., found that consumers were wary of trying the flavor strips, primarily due to concerns about safety and sanitation. Of the 328 people interviewed, just 29% tried them, with women more likely than men to give it a shot. Of the group that tried the flavor strip, 59% said they were more likely to purchase Welch's grape juice.

Telling friends

A full 70% of people interviewed remembered seeing the ad. Of that group, 62% took some action, from mentioning it to others to actually purchasing the juice. Those results put the ad on par with an eightpage insert, as measured against Starch Adnorm figures.

Maxus Communications and JWT worked on the ad for Welch's.

Chris Heye, Welch's VP-chief marketing officer, said the company is still "diving into the results," but sales are trending up. "What part of the media mix is driving that is something we're studying now," he said. "But our core purple grape juice is growing, and it had not been for several years."

First Flavor, which only began signing on clients last year, is still doing plenty of research to determine the efficacy of its product, but Jay Minkoff, president-CEO, isn't surprised by the results of the Starch study. "Overwhelmingly people prefer to try the flavor of the product before they purchase it," he said. "We can imagine a day when you walk into the grocery store and there are [flavor strip] dispensers down the aisle."

We're not there yet, but First Flavor has signed on a number of major companies, so consumers will start to see more of the Peel'n Taste strips in print ads, direct-mail pieces and the grocery aisle. Mr. Minkoff named Skyy Vodka, Sunny Delight, Campbell's Soup and Kellogg as clients, among others.

Thus far, the majority of takers have been beverage companies, which Mr. Minkoff said is partially because of the proliferation of new flavors in the category. But some food brands are also signing on, leading to a pepperoni pizza strip and an apple-cinnamon oatmeal strip. Mr. Minkoff declined to specify the companies commissioning those creations. There's also a decidedly unappetizing flavor strip on its way to market. First Flavor has created a strip that tastes like the bottom of an ashtray, as part of an antismoking campaign for the state of Florida. **AA**

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