

FOOD & DRINK

Mix And Match Can Bolster Sales, But Does It Beat Buying A Brand?

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Mayochup, anyone? How about some Mayomust on that sandwich or some Ketchili on that hamburger? Maybe you'd prefer a little honeyracha?

While mixing and matching is nothing new, Kraft Heinz is hoping that by blending flavors and products such as mayonnaise and ketchup, mayonnaise and mustard, and ketchup and chili, it can further build its brands, while getting more shelf space in stores and real estate in your refrigerator.

On the one hand, they're doing what everybody is: trying to figure out ways to increase revenue, in this case by combining existing products to create new ones. Growing big products bigger is still a main goal. But in a secondary strategy, Kraft Heinz and others are hoping to spin off new products or new flavors from the big sellers.

The Swedish brand DUG has introduced potato milk, Planet-Based Foods recently debuted a hemp burger, and Bel Brands USA now has plant-based baby bel cheeses. Ketchup connoisseurs can try Herr's, Pringles and Ruffles ketchup-flavored potato chips. Snyder's pretzels come in honey mustard.

Beverage makers also are getting creative. Vat19 offers mustard soda pop, using America's "favorite yellow condiment." Just in case, they recommend dipping your pretzels in the new elixir. Soda as sauce? Well, it's worth a try. Grey Poupon in 2020 launched a limited edition La Moutarde Vin, a white wine infused with Grey Poupon mustard seeds. Snapple has more than 30 flavors and says it's "always looking for [more] to add to our lineup."

Launching more products can help multiply sales.

The flavor juggernaut in the ice cream category is legendary. Ben & Jerry's is well known for its specialization in developing new flavors engineered to join top sellers, including Half Baked, Cherry Garcia, and Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough. Even Kraft Heinz had a short run in the frozen dessert race, teaming with Van Leeuwen Ice Cream on a limited release of Kraft Macaroni & Cheese flavored ice cream.

That was a brief blip and a novelty. Will new, more lasting products, concocted by mixing and matching, be part of the special sauce to boost Kraft Heinz's brand sales? The specific products, as well as the presentation and marketing push, may prove part of the answer, but every launch is a tough sell.

Social media can help

Launching new products, even as spin-offs of big sellers, isn't easy. One way is to start online. Kraft Heinz started pre-seeding the market with social media before rolling out a range of new products and shipping to stores. A big reaction online can translate into big demand... as well as build suspense. Kraft Heinz said it gathered about 500,000 votes online in favor of debuting Mayochup in the United States. The product has since taken its place beside ketchup, mustard, BBQ sauce, and its recently launched Heinz mayonnaise.

It's unlikely that Kraft Heinz expects all of its launches to be big hits, but variations don't all have to work. If some succeed, like startups, they can further extend the brand.

Getting people to try something new, however, is always a big barrier. As Alka-Seltzer once coaxed consumers, it all comes down to "try it, you'll like it." Kraft Heinz needs to get consumers to test their new products, which means investing in development, marketing and distribution.

Ultimately, if consumers don't try a new product, it doesn't matter how good it tastes. And sometimes various products built around the same idea can perform very differently. A company claiming to be based in Sandwich, Ill., debuted PJ Squares, which came with peanut butter and jelly. That product has since been discontinued. But Smucker's peanut butter and jelly in a jar seems to have found an audience. And you can find Great Value striped peanut butter and jelly on Walmart.com.

Building v. buying

Mixing and matching can be a successful strategy, but it's risky. There are other ways to go. Expanding a brand is often less expensive than launching a new one, has fewer regulatory and legal requirements, and needs less time to take to market. The idea is to grow incrementally, adding flavor and shelf space, without detracting or distracting from core products. New products – especially if they're novel – can command attention, although that doesn't always translate into profitability. But buying a product or a brand also can be a shortcut, although expensive, to growing sales.

Global giants with critical mass, like Kraft Heinz, don't necessarily have to debut, or even launch, new products in the United States. They can debut wherever they like, catering to local tastes and building a following, before rolling them out here.

Will Kraft Heinz's mixes and matches spice up sales? If customers *relish* the products, they could. The possibilities are endless.