

45. FUNCTIONAL CONFECTIONARY

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Enjoyment with a healthy additive is nowadays more in demand than ever before. There is a strong trend in confectionery towards functional products. An obsession with sweets, alongside a seemingly antithetical focus on health and wellness, has led to the evolution of the functional confectionery category, which Euromonitor International segments into three markets: medicated confectionery, fortified/functional gum and fortified/functional chocolate. Globally, these three categories accounted for more than \$11 billion in retail sales in 2011, growing 3% over the previous year, the market researcher claims. Functional/fortified gum

represents 53% market share, while medicated confectionery comprises 45% and functional chocolate makes up the remaining 2%.

Growing in popularity among consumers and product manufacturers, functional gums represent one of the most promising product areas. Xylitol and baking soda are among the most common ingredients in these gums, which are designed to offer oral health benefits.

Sales of sugar-free gum grew more than 7% in 2009, according to NCA. Fortified gums offer energy boost, smoking cessation, breath freshening, tooth whitening and calcium fortification. Concepts include immune defense, weight management, joint health, heart health and energy. According to the company, “Oral care will see an enhanced focus during 2011 as Gumlink, in collaboration with strong partners, will be able to market concepts with a pharmaceutical touch such as chlorhexidine, oral care probiotics, antacids and also a new concept that in terms of efficacy comes quite close to matching the good old toothbrush.”

Delivering health benefits alongside exceptional taste has been a recipe for success in the functional foods market. Chocolate offers a unique opportunity to provide that profitable combination. Chocolate is a natural vehicle for health due to its naturally occurring cocoa flavonols. Dark chocolate is growing at a higher rate than milk chocolate products because consumers have learned there are higher flavonol levels in dark than milk. According to NCA, dark chocolate sales increased 9% in 2010 and will continue to grow, but at a slower pace than in previous years.

Regular consumption of the cocoa flavonols found in Acticoa can help strengthen the body’s natural resistance to environmental stressors; maintain cardiovascular health, including helping to maintain blood pressure, blood circulation and cholesterol at healthy levels; help maintain skin health, including increased skin elasticity and hydration as well as protection from the harmful effects of ultraviolet (UV) radiation caused by regular exposure to the sun. Companies are also adding protein and fiber to chocolate in order to satisfy consumer cravings for healthier products. For example, Mars’ Snickers brand

launched its Marathon Protein Bar in October 2010. Caramel Nut Rush (20 grams of protein) and Chocolatey Nut Burst (21 grams of protein) are both an “excellent source” of fiber (10 grams) and are low glycemic (index is 26).

Looking to add value to their confectionery products, many companies have started using real fruit or fruit juice ingredients as well as trendy superfruits. For example, Jelly Belly Superfruit Mix Jelly Beans feature Acai Berry, Barbados Cherry, Cranberry, Blueberry and Pomegranate flavors. According to the company, the products are “naturally sweetened” with evaporated cane juice and tapioca syrup and are an “excellent source” of vitamin C. The product is fat-free, gluten-free and each jellybean contains 4 calories. Various fruit powders and retail fruit products were obtained and analyzed for antioxidant capacity. Among the various powders that were tested, cocoa powder was the most concentrated source of ORAC and TF, according to researchers. Similarly, dark chocolate was a significantly more concentrated source of ORAC and TF than the fruit juices, the study concluded. While a high antioxidant content serves chocolate well, its high calorie and fat content has been an obstacle in the functional food market. As manufacturers look to minimize unhealthiness in their products, alternative plant-based sweeteners are gaining importance.

The functional confectionery segment is one with strong potential. Since the idea of adding ingredients with tangible benefits has already been brought to consumers' attention through functional foods in general, functional confectionery products do not require strong consumer education. Thus, the market is ripe for more innovative products.