



SMALL, BOLD & BETTER-FOR-YOU CARRY THE DAY

Convenience Store News' 22nd annual Best New Products Awards recognize 27 new-to-market items that best meet consumers' evolving needs

By Susan Durtschi, Past Times Marketing

SMALL BITES, PRODUCTS with bold, ethnic flavors and, of course, better-for-you snacks and beverages dominate this year's winners list in the 2018 *Convenience Store News* Best New Products Awards program.

Consumers selected 27 products new to convenience store shelves in the past year for recognition. Now in its 22nd year, the Best New Products Awards competition recognizes and honors the marketers that introduced the most innovative and high-quality products that meet consumers' evolving needs.

Judging was supervised by Past Times Marketing, a New York-based consumer research and product testing firm. Entries were rated and awarded points by consumers based on the criteria of taste, value, convenience, healthfulness, ingredients, preparation requirements, appearance and packaging.

THE 2018 BEST NEW PRODUCTS AWARDS HONOREES ARE:

Alternative Snacks/Granola Bars:

Nature Valley Layered Granola Nut Bars — Almond Butter Chocolate; General Mills Convenience

General Mills Convenience brings a new product to the bars

category with a sweet treat that features simple, recognizable ingredients. Nature Valley Layered Granola Nut



Bars have a triple layer of creamy nut butter coating, granola, nuts and chocolate. Layering adds to the taste experience with the almond butter addition. Our panelists called them "less boring" and "better tasting" than your average granola bar. Each 1.38-ounce bar has a suggested retail price of \$1.39, which was deemed a sweet price by testers.

Alternative Snacks/Protein Bars:

On Protein Crisp Salted Toffee Pretzel Bar; Glanbia Performance Nutrition

If you're trying to build muscle mass, this bar has one of the highest protein counts out there at 20 grams — and it was the top pick for taste, texture and received extra credit for being low sugar. The On Protein Crisp Salted Toffee Pretzel Bar is a convenient choice for breakfast, lunch or a snack and garnered high marks for being gluten free.





Alternative Snacks/Meat Snacks:

Stryve Beef Biltong; Stryve Biltong Snacks

Biltong is an ancient word from South Africa that means strips of dried beef. Unlike traditional jerky, biltong is never injected with or soaked in sugar-laden marinades. Stryve Beef Biltong is a protein-packed snack without all the heavy carbs. It ticks off all the current food trend boxes: high in protein, simple ingredients, made in the USA, gluten free, and a better-for-you healthy profile. Each serving has an impressive 16 grams of protein and less than 1 gram of sugar. Stryve Beef Biltong also got high marks for its packaging.



Beer:

Michelob ULTRA Pure Gold; Anheuser-Busch

Anheuser-Busch developed Michelob ULTRA Pure Gold to address the consumer values of transparency, ingredient traceability and overall wellbeing. This beer fills a niche in the traditional beer space by offering an option that is low carb, low calorie and made from organic ingredients. The label calls it “Superior Light Beer” and our testers agreed.



Candy/Chocolate:

Hershey’s Gold Peanuts & Pretzels Bar; The Hershey Co.

The buttery, sweet taste of Hershey’s Gold Bar is a complex mash-up of sweet and salty, creamy and crunchy. The bits of peanuts and pretzels deliver a very noticeable salty crunch that takes this to the next level in taste. Hershey is calling this a fourth flavor profile. The brand got the ratios just right. It was the hands-down favorite of our testing panel.



Candy/Chocolate/Novelty & Seasonal:

M&M’S Ghoul’s Mix; Mars Wrigley Confectionery

Mars Wrigley Confectionery has come out with silly and spooky packaging for its Peanut M&M’S Halloween share pouches. M&M’S Ghoul’s Mix complements the full assortment of M&M’S and creates excitement around the holiday. This product delivers a generous 3.27 ounces of real milk chocolate and roasted peanuts for trick-or-treaters, coworkers or friends.



Candy/Gum:

Ice Breakers Ice Cubes — Peppermint; The Hershey Co.

The first thing you notice about this chewing gum is that it

has an icy blast of flavor. The sugar-free gum from The Hershey Co. also contains Xylitol for teeth protection and has earned the American Dental Association seal of acceptance. Our testers liked the square shape of the product, as well as its refreshing taste.



Candy/Mints:

EXTRA Chewy Mints — Peppermint; Mars Wrigley Confectionery

These mints feature two layers: a thin, crunchy outer shell and a chewy, flavorful inner area. Mars Wrigley Confectionery developed this new innovation in mints because only 20 percent of the mints on the market are chewable. EXTRA Chewy Mints were a hit with our panel. The high-tech packaging also drew in the consumers with its unique design.



Candy/Non-Chocolate:

Skittles Sweet Heat; Mars Wrigley Confectionery

This candy was designed to bring in new customers willing to try a little spice with their sweet candy — not unlike other categories of food capitalizing on



this trend. Skittles Sweet Heat offers a new variety of fruit flavors with just a hint of heat that lingers on the tongue. The package design is clear and tells the story.

Candy/Non-Chocolate/Novelty & Seasonal:

Starburst Minis & Beans; Mars Wrigley Confectionery

This seasonal variety debuted for Easter with unwrapped Starburst logo mini fruit chew squares and Starburst logo mini jelly beans mixed in a 10-ounce bag. Featuring the same bold flavors as before, this package is great for gift giving or sharing at the office.



Cigars:

Game Berry Blast Cigarillos; Swedish Match

Game Berry Blast cigarillos are made with all-natural tobacco fillers infused with the juicy, fruity essence of sweet berries. Swedish Match added the “Limited-Edition” label for extra sales excitement. The cigarillos come in a convenient, individual foil package with three price points to ensure flexibility for retailers.





Dairy Beverages:

Califia Farms Probiotic Yogurt Drink — Super Berry; Califia Farms

C-store customers want healthier options and this cultured nut-milk drink is a great grab-and-go breakfast or snack option. Creamy dairy-free almond and coconut-based yogurt combines with real blueberries and a touch of black currants. This new yogurt drink is super tasty, while having a low-sugar profile and featuring millions of probiotic cultures. Additionally, the nifty-looking bottle has a great look and got extra marks for the perfect 8-ounce portion size.



Edible Grocery:

Chunky Maxx — Black Angus Beef Soup; Campbell Soup Co.

Chunky Maxx, the heartiest Chunky Soup from Campbell's, is for men looking for meals that are filling, quick, easy and tasty. These soups include 40 percent more meat and come in a heat-and-eat microwavable package of 15.5 ounces that is unique and stands out on the shelf. There is a variety of flavors, but Black Angus Beef was our testers' favorite.



Foodservice/Bakery:

Rich's Churro Donut; Rich Products Corp.

Rich's Churro Donut combines an authentic Spanish churro with an American doughnut. It's a mix of cake and yeast formula with a crispy exterior. The Churro Donut contains no artificial ingredients or high fructose corn syrup. For all-day snackers, this is a spot-on item. Our panelists loved them with the cinnamon sugar and thought they added newness to the traditional c-store doughnut display.



Foodservice/Beverages:

Big Tea — Chamomile Mint; Harris Tea

Big Tea is for tea drinkers who want a double-sized tea bag to put in their 16-ounce on-the-go cup. Tea enthusiasts are a rapidly developing market in the nation and an underserved segment. Big Tea bags come in six varieties, from traditional black and green teas to naturally flavored specialty teas. The favorite of our testers was the "smooth and flavorful" Chamomile Mint.



Foodservice/Breakfast:

Italian Breakfast Panini; Johnsonville

The Italian Breakfast Panini with Johnsonville Italian Split Sausage and real scrambled eggs, roasted peppers, onions and provolone cheese on grilled sourdough bread ticks all the boxes for flavor and freshness, according to our panelists. The bread tastes fresh also, which is often a problem with pre-prepared breakfast sandwiches. The Italian Breakfast Panini is ready to heat from the refrigerator or freezer, taking less than 2 minutes in the microwave.



Foodservice/Lunch:

Maid-Rite Sandwich; Land Mark Products — Day 'N Night Bites

Day 'N Night Bites' take on this iconic sandwich (legend has it that the Sloppy Joe was first created in Sioux City, Iowa, in 1930 by a cook named Joe) blew the competition away. It has a special sauce mixed with the meat. The bread was even soft upon microwaving it. Comments like "A 5-star sandwich," "Fresh-tasting sloppy joe" and "Are you sure this was frozen?" were heard more than a couple times from our testers.



Foodservice/Snacks:

State Fair Crisпитos — Chicken Bacon Ranch; Tyson Foods

Tyson delivers a slew of on-trend flavors with its State Fair Crisпитos, a line of handheld, crunchy, protein-filled tortilla snacks. Our testers liked the Chicken Bacon Ranch variety best. The Crisпитos are fully cooked for quick preparation and can be served with dips and garnishes on the side. Our tasters comments included: "Generous portion," "Nice flavors with the crunch" and "Great after-school snack for my kids."



Frozen Foods:

Steak Bowl; Green Chile Food Co.

Bowls are a quick meal for the convenience store customer, and frozen foods have been on an upward trajectory. Green Chile Food Co.'s Steak Bowl is a flavorful meal option that is not unlike a restaurant takeout entrée. This bowl features large pieces of meat, salsa and fresh vegetables, including peppers. Best of all, it can be heated and prepared in under 4 minutes.





Healthy Snacks:

PopChips Nutter Puffs — Peanut Butter & Chocolate; Lil' Drug Store Products

There are a lot of new puffs out there, but these are different. While puffs are traditionally cheese flavored, PopChips Nutter Puffs bring the flavors of peanut butter and chocolate to the segment. There's also a peanut butter only version, but our testers' favorite was the salty and sweet version. Customers are looking for more protein in their snacks and they want them to be natural. These are both.



Other Tobacco Products:

On! Nicotine Pouches; Intercontinental Cigar Corp.

On! Nicotine Pouches are discreet because they are smokeless and can be used anywhere. Pop them in your mouth, and place in front of the top teeth or on the side of the upper lip. The tiny pouch with crystalized nicotine delivers for about 20 minutes.



These 100 percent tobacco leaf free oral pouches are the latest and some say greatest. Our testers liked the Wintergreen flavor.

Packaged Sweet Snacks:

Walkin' Wafels — Apple Cinnamon; Prairie City Bakery

On-the-go Walkin' Wafels are individually wrapped, sweet waffles made with caramelized pearl sugar and rich, whole-wheat brioche dough. This Belgian snack is made the traditional Liège way, which means the waffles are infused with flavor so no messy syrup is required. Walkin' Wafels are available in Apple Cinnamon, Blueberry, Buttery Maple and Vanilla varieties. Apple Cinnamon earned the highest praise from our panelists with comments like "Perfect size" and "No added syrup needed."





Salty Snacks/Crackers:

Cheez-It Duoz — Caramel Popcorn and Cheddar; Kellogg Co.

Cheez-It Duoz Caramel Popcorn and Cheddar got high marks for its decadent amount of caramel on the popcorn paired with the traditional Cheez-It cracker. There is an even amount of both pieces in the bag, as noted by our testers, which was satisfying as they were expecting less caramel corn. The 4-ounce bag is a perfect snacking size to share or not.



Salty Snacks/Nuts & Seeds:

BIGS Sunflower Seeds — Taco Bell Taco Supreme; Conagra Brands

New flavor pairings are key to drawing more customers to the sunflower seeds segment. BIGS Taco Bell Taco Supreme Sunflower Seeds feature the bold combination of taco seasoning plus the strength of the Taco Bell brand, making for a winning combina-



tion. The co-branded product also features generous packaging with a 5.35-ounce bag.

Sports Drinks:

Vitaminwater Active; The Coca-Cola Co.

Vitaminwater Active is a natural sports drink designed for the everyday workout person, not the elite athlete. The beverage is positioned to provide the hydration needed for a good workout through vitamins, electrolytes and coconut water. It comes in three varieties that have sporty names, but are essentially orange/mango, lemon/lime and strawberry/black cherry. All three were well-received by our panel as there was a three-way flavor tie among the testers.





Wine:

Red Sangria Spritzer; E. & J. Gallo Winery

Sangria continues to grow and this Red Sangria Spritzer from E. & J. Gallo's Barefoot brand is a perfect addition to the line. The spritzer is wine based, has 6.5 percent alcohol and is fizzy. This product appeals to the beach and barbecue crowd with its slim tall can.



Cheese, Fiery Hot and Masala varieties were also strong contenders with our testers. Peatos are truly innovative. They taste like "junk food," but have some serious substance. What's more, the packaging has a cool look to it and the flavors are bold and on-trend. **CSN**

Overall Innovation:

World Peas Peatos — Classic Cheese; Snack It Forward



Over the years, customers have been disappointed in the taste and texture of so-called "healthy" versions of national brands. That's not the case with World Peas' Peatos. Made with real cheese, and nutritionally dense with sustainable peas and lentils, the Classic Cheese variety delivers a bold cheese flavor with a big crunch, without the empty calories. The Chili

Susan Durtschi, an experienced buyer and product development specialist for both brick-and-mortar and online retailers, is president of Past Times Marketing, a consumer research firm. For the ninth consecutive year, Convenience Store News partnered with Past Times Marketing for the Best New Products Awards. Past Times works via focus groups and through online surveys with consumers across the country to judge new products. For more information, go to www.pasttimes-marketing.com.