

SNACKIN' AND RAPPIN'

Rap Snacks brings snack products with a message to urban youth thanks to partnerships throughout the product development and launch process.

By Jill Rivkin

When it comes to marketing to urban youth between the ages of 18 and 24, Rap Snacks, Greensboro, N.C., has identified a unique and powerful market with its edgy, affordably priced and flavorful snack. And when it comes to an appropriate business model, the company has identified that, too—as all of production, including research and development, is outsourced.

“Our model is to stay as lean as possible and work through our partnerships and manufacturers,” says James Lindsay, owner of the nearly 15-year-old business. “We’re a marketing company, and we look for partnerships with contract manufacturers because we think it’s a financially sound business decision.”

What’s Happenin’?

Currently, Lindsay says the company is working with three contract manufacturers, and hopefully four soon, on developing and manufacturing four brands of snacks, all of which appeal to niche demographics.

Rap Snacks, for one, integrates the culture of the rap music industry with affordable snacks for urban youth. Uniquely and highly flavored chips sell for just 35 cents a bag and feature various artists and information about them on the bag. And to help fulfill what Lindsay says is

his company’s social responsibility, the bags also communicate positive messages about life to help reshape kids’ and parents’ views of the rap industry.

“I thought there was a niche for kids that enjoy music and would enjoy seeing artists on the bag,” Lindsay says. “Socially we are committed to young kids that are buying our products on a daily basis so we decided to put positive messages on the bags to motivate and encourage those kids. I think that they look at the artist, eat the snack and associate the message with the artist and the brand. Rap often has a negative connotation, and we’re coming to the market in a positive environment and with another perspective.”

“Rap Snacks’ biggest strength is that it is a lifestyle brand, and kids can relate to the product – the brand itself,” Lindsay adds.

Rap Snacks’ products are distributed to primarily mom-and-pop stores in urban settings up and down the East Coast and throughout Midwest cities. Distribution, Lindsay says, is really challenging for independents in the snack business, but he hopes to eventually get Rap Snacks items into big-box stores with variety sacks and continued expansion of his brand and message.

The company also owns Mr. G, a snack brand Lindsay bought 10 years ago featuring a few varieties of intensely flavored chips; and Sylvia’s Snack Food, a supermarket

RAP SNACKS®

brand based on a soul-food restaurant. Lindsay says he plans to launch Rock Snacks but is looking for a partner to do meat snacks and other products that fit the brand's "hard core" image.

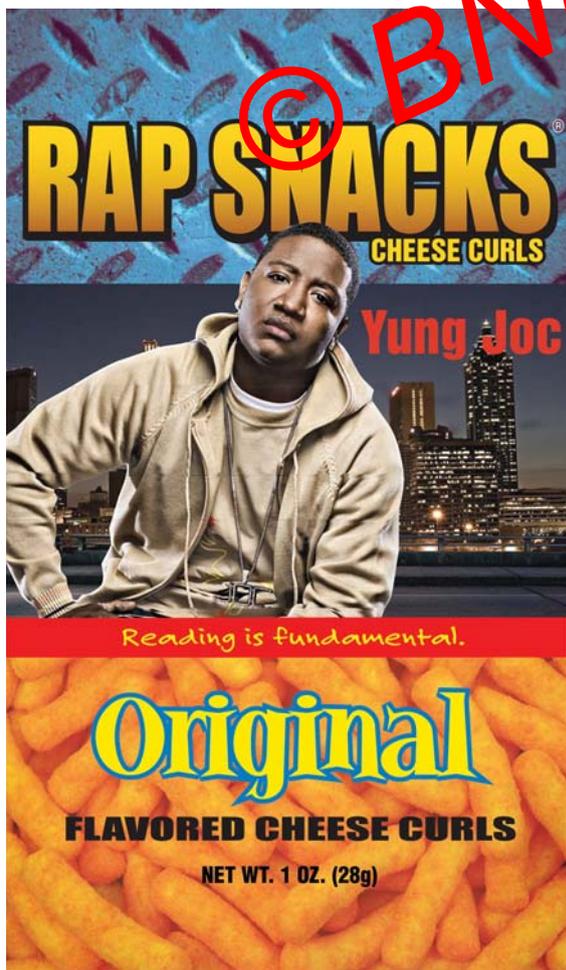
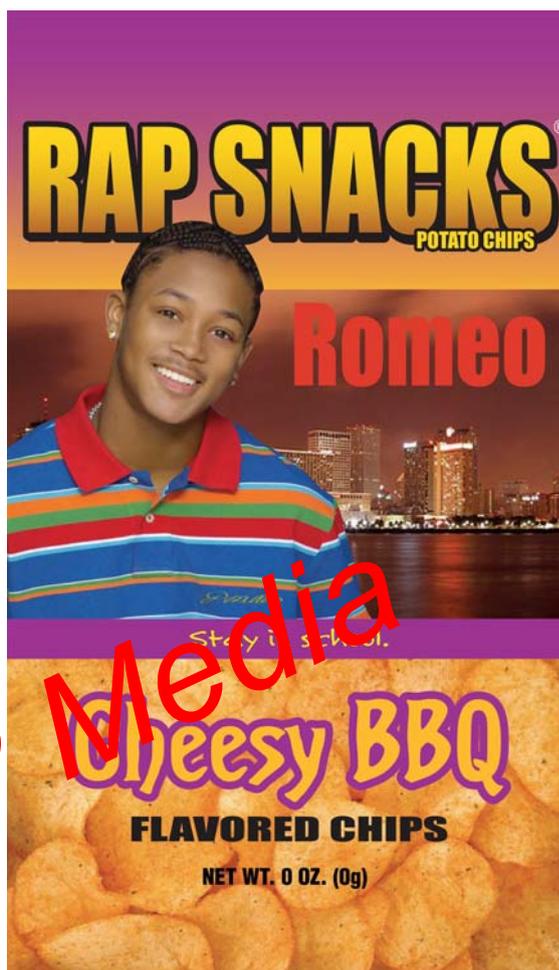
What's to Come

When looking for partners, Lindsay says some of the biggest challenges are the manufacturers' wingspan geographically and finding companies with very consistent seasoning processes.

"In this marketplace, distribution is king," he says. "I've been approached about partnerships outside of snacks, but I have to make sure they have quality and distribution capabilities."

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- JAMES LINDSAY, RAP SNACKS



And as far as flavor profiles are concerned, Lindsay says flavor is much of the foundation of his business. In terms of his demographics, urban youth tend to like highly flavored products, as well as unique ones that you likely won't find in the supermarket today. From when Lindsay was a kid mixing up bags of different flavored chips and putting his family on taste-test panels, he has had a knack for developing flavor profiles and still puts that skill to the test.

"I consider myself a connoisseur of snack foods," he says. "As I've gotten older, I've gotten more sophisticated with understanding the marketplace and looking at trends."

And as both his business and the contract manufacturing and packaging industry continue to develop, Lindsay is optimistic.

"I think the sky is the limit – you have all kinds of private label manufacturing going on right now, and if you look at the marketplace and the overall segment of the snack business and the economy, there will be more partnerships because it's more economical," Lindsay says. "Companies can save money and invest in marketing – the model of our company is going to be a lot more popular in the future." ||