

By Pauline Hammerbeck

BRANDS TO WATCH!

Five independents earn “MUST SEE” status

As recent as the 80s, television programming was something to be anticipated. Thursday nights, for instance, were “Must-See TV” nights, with *Seinfeld*, *Frasier* and *Friends* dominating the ratings. Today, though, there are simply too many choices and media outlets for any one to earn that moniker. ●

It’s much the same situation for brands. Their sheer numbers make it difficult for any one to grab our attention for any longer than a fleeting moment. And for upstarts and independents, and their typically miniscule marketing budgets, it’s an even steeper challenge to make meaningful connections. ● That marks the following five brands even more exceptional for making it onto our radar. Yes, they each have strong product concepts, smart positioning and visionary leadership. But it’s their instinct for making the most of limited resources with relevant, well-designed and innovative packaging that puts them on our schedule of “Brands to Watch”. On any night of the week. >



> 479° POPCORN

Success has come quickly for 479° Popcorn, with revenues tripling each month since the heirloom organic popcorn brand launched in September 2008.

Starting with a high-end candy boutique in San Francisco called Sweet Dish, the artisan brand has swiftly expanded distribution in the Bay Area and across California and built an equally viable online corporate and consumer gift business.

Founder Jean Arnold says that, in developing the brand identity with its San Francisco design firm The Engine Room, it was clear the focus had to be on the popcorn. Using a close-up of popping kernels as the iconic graphic, the minimalist packaging communicates a “made in small batches” quality message and also translates what might be perceived as an old-fashioned product into a modern offering that appeals to foodies, the brand’s target audience.

“What I learned in the process is that it’s hard to be very streamlined and simplified,” says Jean. “But we stuck to it. Anyone who picks up our packaging can get a sense of our attention to detail, and our focus on quality and perfection.”

That’s not to say the paperboard cartons and canisters are stripped of character. Color bands and textile patterns add personality and play up each of the brand’s eight varieties—a tactic meant to help shoppers identify 479’s adventurous flavors and distinguish them from the boring, basic assortment typical of mass brands.

It was also important for the packaging to stand up to the demands of mail order, another strong channel for the brand. Orders for 479’s five-box sampler packs and the larger canister collections ship out in a master carton that’s designed as gift packaging, with a UV coating that helps withstand the rigors of distribution.

Arnold makes a point to say that all of the detail that went into the packaging is also indicative of the work that went into the premium popping corn itself. She spent more than a year and a half in the test kitchen, sourcing heirloom popcorn varieties, developing flavor profiles and certifying the brand organic.

“It’s essential that your product meets the expectations and delivers the promises you make on the packaging,” she explains. The most important thing, she says, “is that the two work together.”

> **Popcorn kernels are the star of 479’s minimalist packaging, but each flavor has its own color and pattern to add richness to the canisters and cartons.**

> KIDFRESH

Matt Cohen had one of those “aha” moments preparing his son’s lunch one day.

“It dawned on me that, with all the healthy take-out offerings [for adults], there was nothing specifically geared toward kids,” he said.

Partnering with Gilles Deloux, a former Dannon food marketer, Cohen launched Kidfresh in January 2007 as a child-oriented food store with pint-sized shopping carts and prepared lunchboxes, dinners and snacks for babies and kids.

Berkeley, Calif.-based Addis Creson developed a bold brand identity for the concept, and it was translated by Brooklyn, N.Y.-based Landers Miller across every touchpoint: the web site, collateral, store interior graphics and signage and, of course, the >