

Trading licks

Will newspapers grab consumers by the tongue?

WILLY WONKA would be proud. When Adnan Aziz saw people licking orange-flavoured wallpaper in the film "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory", it gave him the idea for a novel form of advertising. Together with Jay Minkoff, an entrepreneur, he set up First Flavor, a firm that makes edible films that allow consumers to sample the flavours of foods, drinks and other products.

So far First Flavor has distributed films that taste of grape juice, acai-berry juice, lime-spiked rum and baking-soda toothpaste in shops and magazines, and via direct-mail campaigns. The company even designed a deliberately foul-tasting cigarette-flavoured strip to distribute to schoolchildren as part of an anti-smoking initiative. Now, in partnership with US Ink, a big supplier of newspaper ink, First Flavor has set its sights on a broader and riskier market: newspapers.

Just as retailers stuff American newspapers with coupons and sales promotions, the idea is to get food and drink companies to attach a sealed pouch, containing a flavour sample, to front-page newspaper advertisements for their products. Consumers can then take them for a "taste drive", puns Mr Minkoff. First Flavor has already run magazine-based campaigns, so edible ads in newspapers are an obvious next step.

The difficulty is that magazine advertising, by its very nature, can be more targeted. Welch's, an American juicemaker, placed an edible advertisement in People magazine in order to reach mothers, for example. First Flavor's ad campaigns on behalf of SKYY vodka and Captain Morgan's rum were similarly specific: they involved giving out flavour samples at liquor retailers. Newspapers tend to have a broader readership, which could deter advertisers, since the edible films may appeal to only a small proportion of readers. And unlike scented ads, which can be used to create an aura (a resort, for instance, might use a coconut scent to evoke tropical relaxation), edible ones can only advertise the product itself.

But First Flavor and US Ink think the collapse in newspaper advertising revenue, as a result of the recession and the rise of the internet, provides an opportunity. Internet advertisements can do all sorts of things, but so far there is no way to transmit tastes electronically. Edible ads would allow newspapers to offer something the internet cannot match.

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