

The Wow Factor

Jelly Belly capitalizes on the color, shape and flavors it has built over its long history to bring new licensed products to market.

by AMANDA CIOLETTI

IT'S ARGUABLE THAT Jelly Belly is synonymous with jelly beans, much like particular major soda brands are proxies for cola or Kleenex is colloquial for tissue. Jelly Belly has come to symbolize quality and sophisticated flavor profiles in the candy category, and it's no wonder—they've perfected the business.

A candy company (marketed originally under the Herman Goelitz brand) since 1898, Jelly Belly came into its more current iterations in 1976. Since, each decade has brought new innovations in flavor, color and shape, all tenets of the Jelly Belly brand as we know it today. (Jelly Belly Candy Company became the company's official name in 2001.) Today, more than 15 billion Jelly Belly jelly beans are consumed annually.

And with that long history and deep brand recognition—94 percent, according to Jelly Belly, and the No. 1 jelly bean brand in major markets such as the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Australia and Germany—comes opportunity for brand extensions.

"Jelly Belly is very on trend now, but it was ahead of its time in taking something very humble and from that, creating something very interesting and deep," says Rob Swaigen, vice president, global marketing, Jelly Belly Candy Company. "Before Jelly Belly, jelly beans were largely relegated to Easter baskets and sold seasonally. Jelly Belly goes very deep into single flavors



ROB SWAIGEN
vice president, global marketing,
Jelly Belly Candy Company

with real fruit juice in the center of the bean, which had never been done before. Jelly Belly then became something special that was premium priced that put jelly beans on the map. We have been thought of differently ever since with relevance all year long."

Licensing has been a part of the Jelly Belly business portfolio for well over a decade, amassing 35 partners throughout the world with placement in more than 40,000 retail doors. According to Jelly Belly, the company booked \$75 million in retail sales of licensed consumer products in 2017, earning it a spot (No. 148) on *License Global's* Top 150 Global Licensors report. And with 100-plus flavors to pull from for inspiration, extension concepts are endless.

In partnership with licensing agent CAA-GBG, Jelly Belly has cultivated long-term partnerships that continually generate placement in every corner of the globe.

When extending the brand beyond its core candy, the Jelly Belly team is interested in licensing deals that make sense and that subscribe to its true brand tenets. This approach allows the company to tap into flavor and scent in a whole range of ways, from beauty products to scented screen wipes, air fresheners and even ice cream shops.

"We shoot for 'wow,' which is literally the [fourth generation candy maker] Herm Rowland litmus test for what is successful. It is at the top of the pyramid in how we think of product development," says Swaigen. "It's an experience that is difficult to define because there is no single element—it's all things coming together. When something is colorful, leverages the fun of the brand, has a whimsical, lighthearted nature and a scent that closely matches our core product—those are things we're looking for."



Hero licensed product extensions for Jelly Belly are numerous and varied, but certainly always fun.

Recently, Jelly Belly teamed with beauty brand Sally Hansen for a line of 11 nail polishes inspired by classic candy flavors such as very cherry, bubble gum, berry blue and strawberry cheesecake.

“Sally Hansen has done a great job of incorporating our core assets into the product line,” says Swaigen. “They’ve leveraged our colors, created a fun display at retail and a great line of product that very closely mirrors what we are doing with Jelly Belly. It’s a much more three-dimensional approach than just placing a logo on a t-shirt.”

Last year, Jelly Belly partnered with Dyla Brands to launch a line of flavored water enhancers in popular candy flavors for sale at major grocery stores and on Amazon; and, in cooperation with SEGA, the company is gearing up to launch a digital “videmption” arcade game concept that will roll out to amusement centers and other location-based entertainment destinations later this year. Other major partnerships include CAE for air fresheners, which the company says sell every seven seconds and is available in more than 20 fragrances across six different formats; Corsair for health, beauty and fragrance products; Roy Lowe for socks; Gift Universe for tech accessories; and many more.

Jelly Belly is also entering new categories, most recently debuting ice cream parlors in the Middle East with partner JB Brands. Eight stores are currently in operation that feature ice cream flavors that draw on Jelly Belly’s lineup of gourmet flavors. The partnership is a win for the Jelly Belly brand on many levels, says Swaigen.

“Aside from the great product that the parlors have—and we spent a lot of time working directly with the JB Brands team to bring this product to life—the fact that this is an experience to be enjoyed in a store that is Jelly Belly-themed turns the brand on in a three-dimensional way, with the product right at its center. It’s a bullseye for us,” he says.

It’s a concept that Swaigen and Jelly Belly would like to see expand beyond the market.

Licensing in also continues to be an immediate win for the Jelly Belly brand, as it pairs with best-in-class licensors like Warner Bros., The Walt Disney Company, Universal and fellow food brands, such as Krispy Kreme Doughnuts.

But perhaps its biggest swing—and yet also biggest opportunity—has been for the gross-out flavors that kicked off via the *Harry Potter* Bertie Bott’s license from Warner Bros.

“Our objective has always been to present ourselves as an innovator, to keep our product relevant and, frankly, to take some risks,” says Swaigen.

With that license, Jelly Belly was able to do what it does best—have fun and not take itself too seriously. After all, how could you when you are putting to market a vomit flavored jelly bean?

“We like to catch people off-guard sometimes and have some fun, but the gross-out flavors also project our mastery of flavor and our confidence in how we go to market,” says Swaigen.

The experiment proved a win for Jelly Belly and one that resonates with its fans, launching also a proprietary line, BeanBoozled, now in its fifth edition, which asks consumers to take risks in each bite. Will you get dirty dishwasher or birthday cake? Stink bug or toasted marshmallow? Rotten egg or buttered popcorn?

But what’s Swaigen’s favorite flavor?

“Cantaloupe for the past year, but before that it was kiwi,” he says.

As for the general public, very cherry and buttered popcorn rank highly, the latter proving polarizing in social media circles as people scramble to argue their cases for or against certain flavors. It’s a silly debate, but it’s eye opening as far as the brand is concerned—people really care about Jelly Belly and have defined opinions about the pervasive candy.

“The question ‘what is your favorite flavor?’ generates the most chatter, and, to some degree, even heated debates when we post questions like that on our social media channels,” says Swaigen. “People want to get in a corner and defend buttered popcorn against licorice. They are very passionate about it. With 100-plus flavors, it’s not hard for anyone to find something that they like.” ©

