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Mars taps WS to promote brand's health benefits

Edgar Sandoval PR Week USA Nov 7 2005

Mars Inc. is combining America's number one killer and America's number one guilty pleasure into one healthlicious public relations campaign.

The global candy factory hired New York-based firm Weber Shandwick to help promote the CocoaVia brand, emphasizing both the snacks' rich chocolate flavor and their healthy-heart benefits. "Most people have had a hearth-health scare or know someone who has had one," said Marlene Machut, Mars' director of health and science communications. "People are turning to their health more." Mainstream media has been connecting the dots between chocolate and its health values. Mars Inc. took that idea a step further and unveiled the new line, after 15 years of research. It's part of the company's new unit, Mars Nutrition for Health & Well Being. CocoaVia chocolate bars contain a patented blend of heart-healthy cocoa flavanols and cholesterol-lowering plant sterols from soy and other heart-healthy nutrients. The firm is focusing solely on a public relations campaign with its slogan "Be Good to Your Heart Everyday." Mars Inc. sought the backing of several medical experts and researchers in and outside the Mars Company, including medical journals studies and mentions in the American Heart Association.

The science-friendly drive has already garnered mainstream attention with recent news stories in The New York Times, ABC's World News Tonight, Good Morning America and other outlets. Print and television ads may be considered in the future, Machut said. The public's reaction remains to be seen, since CocoaVia products were recently released in October, she said. The chocolate bars will only be sold in the health sections of mass merchandise stores and healthy foods stores instead of the candy aisles, said Jim Cass, Vice President for Marketing at Mars, Inc. "That's because it delivers real heart-health benefits supported by sound science," Cass said. The challenge remains convincing American consumers that a healthy product can taste good, Machut said. Diet products have a reputation for lacking good taste and good tasting products are associated with junk food. "People tend to be real suspicious," she said. "Once they try it they tell us 'Wow, this taste good.'" Katherine Rothman, CEO of KMR Communications, a New York agency focusing on health, beauty and fitness-related products, said the best way to reach consumers is by promoting the product's strong-heart benefits in different health and medical trade magazines. "It could be promoted to adults and children," Rothman said. "Adults want to be healthier, and children love chocolate."

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