

Food & Drink

AN AUGMENTED
REALITY CHECK **P20**

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LE MAC SHRINK SLEEVES AID A *Rum Rebellion*





“We see ourselves as an innovation company and we have a very strong R&D team... about 20 per cent of staff are R&D related. Sometimes we’re even a little bit ahead of ourselves and the market isn’t quite ready for the innovation.”

Smooth operator

As people age, their dietary requirements often change. Samantha Schelling spoke to an Australian manufacturer catering to the needs of the elderly – and growing its business in the process.

BERNADETTE Eriksen founded Flavour Creations 20 years ago with a mission to create food products for the elderly and people with disabilities. Back then she was the sole staff member, but by 2013 there were 55 core staff. This year the company’s growing range of products and channel strategies have seen that number nearly double to 105 – and when production volumes demand it, staff numbers swell to 120. Flavour Creations is a

specialist in nutritional supplements as well as food products for people with dysphagia – those who have difficulty swallowing. This can affect people with problems of the brain or nervous system as well as older adults. The incidence of dysphagia is expected to grow as the Baby Boomer generation ages.

Much of Eriksen’s conversation focuses on a philosophy of “food first”. She sees a place for shakes and bars, but knows from market and

anecdotal research that people want to eat “real food”.

“We’ve just stayed passionate about what we do, and it’s fun,” she says.

“We focus on better patient outcomes – improving malnutrition, returning dignity to people, satisfying customer needs – and we do that with solid, food-first products that are nutritionally beneficial and taste wonderful.

“You can’t keep giving people milkshakes with extra eggs and supplements – they don’t have



Last year Flavour Creations launched its first nutritionally complete powdered supplement, AdVital, which can be added to food and drinks.



“The response has far exceeded our expectations,” Eriksen says. “We had a plan of how our sales would track and it’s just absolutely boomed – there’s a 30 per cent increase on projected budget.”

The results seem to be coming from the fact that patients are thriving in the trials Flavour Creations has done in hospitals and residential aged care.

“Malnutrition cuts across all sectors and it’s a serious issue within Western society today,” she says.

“This is not just in aged care and hospitals – most of the morbidly obese part of the population are actually malnourished.”

CROSSING SECTORS

Flavour Creations has made retail versions of its foodservice products, and there are now 300 pharmacies across the country stocking AdVital. The team also works with distributors such as BrightSky – well known among people with disabilities. Other keen distributors have approached them to sell direct to the public too, and they are fast-growing. At the end of last year, the products went into some pharmacies in New Zealand.

AdVital brought the number of products in Flavour

Creations’ nutrition range to 40 – but Eriksen is not one to rest on her laurels. It’s very much a case of ‘watch this space’.

Last year also saw Flavour Creations’ foodservice sector achieve significant growth. The company took its Nourish branded range of reduced-sugar custards, fruit purees with jelly, chia jelly snacks and creamed rice retail products that were already selling nationally, and created 10 new products.

“FMCG represents around 20 per cent of our turnover now, with dysphagia and nutrition products making up the other 80 per cent,” she said.

“Within that, the split between those two is about 60/40.”

OFF THE SHELF

AMBIENT OFFERINGS

All Flavour Creations’ products are stable at ambient temperature.

“We don’t do cold chain,” Bernadette Eriksen, Flavour Creations founder and MD, says.

“We set ourselves some challenges, it’s part of our environmental policy to try to reduce our carbon footprint. Keeping everything shelf stable at ambient temperature goes a long way across the board.

“This also makes storage easier in facilities. Taking a carton across to the other side of the hospital is easy because it doesn’t need refrigeration.

“That also gives patients and facilities flexibility. If they want a product cold, they can refrigerate it, but it doesn’t need it. All this comes back to our R&D.”



The Nourish branded range includes new reduced-sugar custards, fruit purees with jelly, chia jelly snacks and creamed rice retail products.

INNOVATION

DELIVERY DESIGN 'GAME CHANGER'

For its new European export range, Flavour Creations has designed a patent-pending cup.

"With dysphagia, you need to close a person's airways when they're drinking because they're at risk of aspiration," Bernadette Eriksen, founder and MD, says.

"It's what speech pathologists call a chin tuck or no-neck-extension," she explains.

"Worldwide, we're known to be the market leaders in this area.

"We've designed a new dysphagia cup. It has patented functional angles and shapes that will actually enable someone with dysphagia to drink from, and empty the cup, without any neck extension. This means people can drink at will instead of relying on somebody else.

"It's huge, and will mean increased compliance as well, because a lot of people will think: 'I've got to bother someone to have another sip so I won't'. This gives them back some dignity and independence.

"So it's about innovation and better patient outcomes, but that's not just in what's sitting inside the cup, it's their ability to actually feed themselves."

All Flavour Creations' dysphagia drink offerings will move across to this new cup, which will be launched by the Queensland Minister for Health in April at the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane.

"It's a funky, cool, non-medical cup that is a piece of art. That's why we're launching it there."



This Nourish jelly snack has chia to boost protein.

EXPORT AND R&D

Eriksen identifies several factors driving Flavour Creations' success.

"We see ourselves as the innovation company and so we have a very strong R&D team – about 20 per cent of staff are R&D related," she says.

"Sometimes we're even a little bit ahead of ourselves and the market isn't quite ready for the innovation we've thought up.

"We also get a good understanding of what our customers' needs are, and we tailor products to that.

"It's about empowering people and getting them to continue enjoying the simple pleasure of eating."

Flavour Creations' latest forays – which involve export and design innovation – also have Eriksen excited.

At the start of this year Flavour Creations finalised a partnership agreement with an international global health science company to export a range of nutritional and dysphagia products into Europe. Part of the process was redesigning the products' drinking cup (see side panel).

Currently, 10 per cent of Flavour Creations' business is exported into Asia and New Zealand, but this new dysphagia cup shape will see that increase significantly.

Eriksen says the company will continue to focus on putting products in front of people who need it by growing both its foodservice and retail ranges.

RETAIL PUSH

"Because we're so advanced with our innovation and nutrient-dense products, a lot of that transfers into the FMCG world for people with sporting requirements and those boosting general health," she says.

AROUND
80%
THE AMOUNT OF
COMPANY TURNOVER
GENERATED BY
DYSPHAGIA AND
NUTRITION FOOD
SERVICE PRODUCTS

"So now we need to go and build that brand and that profile within the FMCG sector."

While it also contract-manufactures for major FMCG groups, Flavour Creations will concentrate on developing its own, eponymous retail brand.

"In the past we've used some other names, but we're moving everything across to the

'Flavour Creations' brand for those new chia jellies, custards and fruit jellies.

"This is because we have 20,000 clinicians and foodservice operators across the country who know and trust our brand. So if they're saying to a patient: 'You can go into Woolworths and buy this product', it makes it so much easier to have the same name as what they had in hospital.

"We're always looking at different channels we can tailor products for, and that increases staff and makes us more significant in the marketplace. We're pretty proud of that. A lot of manufacturers have gone, but we're growing every year."

RAPID GROWTH

Eriksen said the company has experienced double-digit growth every year, but the past two years have been particularly rapid. 2014-15 sales grew 16 per cent, and 2013-14 they grew 24 per cent.

"I don't see that plateauing, because within the Australian market dysphagia, the condition that we tailor products to, is only going to increase in number because our Baby Boomers are starting to age.

"Dysphagia's prevalence in people 65 years and older is around 30 per cent, and for those over 75 years of age it's about 50 per cent. The need is growing." *

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