

Local juice firms crank up with new drinks

By JUDITH CROWN

Two Canadian juice companies are trying to expand their presence in the United States with the launch of new products by their Chicago-based subsidiaries.

Both firms, Everfresh Inc. of Franklin Park and Chicago's McCain Citrus Inc., hope to capitalize on the growing popularity of juice-based drinks, which are seen as more refreshing and lighter than traditional orange juice and healthier than carbonated soft drinks.

Consumption of juice drinks grew 8.3% last year, far outpacing the 3.2% growth of pure juices, according to Beverage Marketing

Corp., a New York-based industry consultant.

But while the category is growing, the upstarts must contend with well-established national concerns, such as Tropicana and Ocean Spray, which in recent years have been bringing out their own juice drink blends and have big bucks to support their brands.

However, that doesn't mean newcomers to the category are boxed out, says Hellen Berry, associate director of marketing research at Beverage Marketing. "There's room for more innovation."

Everfresh Inc., the U.S.-based fruit beverage subsidiary of Canadian brewer John Labatt Ltd., which has a stable of regional brands, plans to expand and promote Everfresh as its flagship label.

Labatt entered the juice business in 1983 with the acquisition of a Windsor, Ontario, juice maker. In 1985, Labatt purchased several juice brands in the Midwest, including Wagner, Rich 'N Ready and Detroit-based Everfresh, consolidating all of them under the Everfresh operation, now based in Franklin Park. The firm currently has sales of \$75 million (U.S.) in Canada and \$95 million in this country.

"There was a substantial Midwest drink business, but the (Wagner label) was allowed to drift away," says Everfresh President and CEO Hugo Powell, 44.

The company plans to beef up

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Wagner, which is sold mostly in Kansas. But it plans to lavish most of its attention on Everfresh, which is being positioned as a more upscale label, competing most directly with Tropicana's new blends, Tropicana Twisters.

So far, Everfresh has lined up distribution at Jewel Food Stores, Eagle Stores, Omni warehouse stores owned by Dominick's Finer Foods Inc., as well as independents.

To launch the brand, Everfresh hired Lipson Alport Glass, the Chicago package design firm, to design a new logo—used on everything from shipping boxes to letterheads—and new packaging. "What the consumer sees on the shelf is the first and last chance to draw attention," says Howard Alport, principal of the design firm.

The firm plans to spend \$672,000 next year to promote the Everfresh juice blends in the Chicago area, in-



"If we can get (consumers to try us), we know we've got a business," says Hugo Powell, left, president and CEO of Everfresh Inc., with Howard Alport, whose firm designed a new logo and packaging for the Everfresh line of juice-based drinks.

cluding trade promotions, print advertisements and coupons.

"If we can get (consumers to try us), we know we've got a business," Mr. Powell says. "The hard part is getting trial."

Meanwhile McCain Citrus, the U.S. subsidiary of McCain Foods Ltd., has been putting big bucks behind Boku, a juice drink packaged in 12-ounce aseptic cartons targeted to young adults. Most of the juices being sold in the portable paper and foil packs are in 8-ounce servings and are geared to kids' lunch boxes.

McCain in 1985 purchased Bodine's Inc., Chicago-based maker of private-label orange juice. (The former owners of Bodine's have been indicted on charges of selling adulterated orange juice between 1979 and 1985, but McCain has not been implicated in this investigation.)

McCain has juice sales of \$130 million in the United States, and its Canadian parent, McCain Foods Ltd., had sales of \$2 billion (U.S.) last year.

Boku is McCain's first attempt to establish a juice brand in this country; its Canadian juices are sold under the McCain label. The brand is being sold in Chicago at Jewel and Dominick's and is distributed in four other Midwestern states, according to Nick Andrus, vice-president of marketing for McCain Citrus.

McCain is spending \$2 million in television and radio advertising this year to launch Boku in the Midwest. That doesn't include additional funds being spent on promotions.

Boku represents only 5% of McCain Citrus' business, but is expected to spur the firm's growth, says President Michael McCain. The company plans to launch other branded juice products, he says.