

A clean reformulation

Blossom Water adds function to lineup

THE NEW YEAR IS A TIME WHEN MANY LOOK TO START ANEW. BUT BLOSSOM Water LLC couldn't wait that long, and that eagerness has paid dividends for the Westwood, Mass.-based company when it announced in mid-2018 that it was rolling out a reformulated version of its fruit- and flower-infused spring water.

By way of background, the brand's line of essence water is the only one using a different flower botanical in each of its SKUs, bringing to the U.S. market aromatic flavors long appreciated by many cultures around the world, the company says.

Building on that differentiated platform, Blossom Water launched Version 2.0 of the line in June 2018 for the purpose of enhancing three product features: functionality, sweetener system and packaging, says Founder and Chief Executive Officer Steve Fortuna.

"Version 2.0, at its very core, was designed to be a mainstream functional botanical water," he explains.

When looking to add function to its product line, Fortuna notes the increasing consumer demand for products that support preventive health goals influenced the beverage-maker.

"What we're seeing in the marketplace is that people are moving toward things to help prevent an adverse health situation from occurring in the first place," he says.

Citing a Datamonitor survey that questioned 28,000 consumers around the globe, Fortuna says that immune health was the No. 2 most-desired benefit in food or beverage, second only to general health and wellness.

Blossom Water is addressing immune health by adding Staimune, a shelf-stable probiotic manufactured by Cleveland-based Ganeden, now part of Kerry Group. "We are using ... a shelf-stable probiotic, which is an inactivated culture that provides all the immune health benefit of live culture," Fortuna says.

Fortuna explains that the decision to add Staimune came as more consumers have expressed an interest in probiotics. "There has been an increasing awareness over the past years of the benefits of probiotics," he says.

Because consumers traditionally have been limited to kombucha or other sour-tasting fermented products when seeking probiotics in a food or beverage, Fortuna explains that the market was ripe for a light and refreshing water that could offer the same immune health benefits.

Noting that the functional ingredient does not impact the water's flavor, Fortuna expects Blossom Water is at an advantage by being an early adopter of

this technology.

"We think that is where the market is headed and that we have a great first-mover advantage in this area, so we couldn't be more excited about where this will lead the brand over the next 12-18 months," he says.

TAKING IT MAINSTREAM

Although function was one of the first steps undertaken by Blossom Water's reformulation, the brand also revisited its sweetener composition.

"The sweetener system was completely re-engineered to one which eliminated the agave and erythritol, and brought in a very high-grade stevia as well as raw organic cane sugar," Fortuna says. "Not much cane sugar, because we took the calories way down."

He noted that the new system allowed for a 55 percent drop in calories and carbohydrates compared with the previous version; Blossom Water now boasts a Nutrition Facts label of only 10 calories in each serving, or 20 calories in each 16.9-ounce PET bottle.

"It's all part of the clean label," Fortuna says. "What we have now with high-grade stevia and a little bit of raw organic cane sugar is certainly a much cleaner, healthier blend than the prior agave and erythritol."

As to its impact on flavor, Fortuna enthuses that the sweetener refresh actually has elevated Blossom Water's flavor profile. "Our flavors are brighter," he explains. "There's now even more fullness of flavor in the bottle than there was before. So we think we hit a home run because, typically, when you want to add function and reduce sugar, it's almost a given that you're going to have to compromise on taste. But, in fact, most of our customers prefer the taste of Version 2.0 to that of Version 1.0."

In addition to function and flavor, Blossom Water knew that if it wanted its ready-to-drink beverage to be mainstream, it would need to shift its packaging from glass to PET. "We wanted everybody to be able to drink this," Fortuna says. "PET is good for those on the go because it's lightweight with no breakage risk. Good for an active lifestyle is what we're saying."

The new packaging format also has allowed the water brand to penetrate channels previously inaccessible, such as educational and hospitality settings. For instance, it is currently rolling out at



(Image courtesy of Blossom Water LLC)

an elite Cambridge, Mass.-based university and is in testing with two luxury Las Vegas hotel chains, Fortuna explains.

Beyond the primary packaging, Blossom Water also updated its label. "What we found was the original label didn't really give the shelf pop that we needed, so we moved to a white matte finish," Fortuna says.

All these tweaks have begun to pay off. "We have re-engaged in-store sampling activities now that Version 2.0 is out, and our sales at such events have more than doubled," Fortuna says. "We're extraordinarily encouraged that we can be in any given grocery store ... and be moving two or more times the amount of Version 2.0 than we did at the very same store with Version 1.0 just six months earlier.

"People are really digging the probiotics, they're digging the package," he continues. "They like the lower calories, and they love the flavor."

SWEET INNOVATION

In conjunction with the release of Version 2.0 was development of Blossom Water's newest flavor: Mango Hibiscus.

Noting that the company tests a lot of fruit and flower botanical essences, Fortuna explains that the decision to formulate a mango-flavored product

was partly driven by discussions with category buyers across various retail channels.

"Mango is definitely trending strongly," Fortuna says. "And so is hibiscus. It's a flower that is well recognized and used extensively throughout Latin America and many other parts of the world. ... We wanted to take fruits and flowers that are recognizable, on-trend and, of course, that make for a delicious combination."

"The mango has a sweet, ripe taste and aroma that is complemented by the tart, cranberry-like hibiscus," he continues. "The flavor's only [been] out a few months and so far it's 100 percent thumbs up on feedback."

Introducing Mango Hibiscus and its other flavors to the U.S. marketplace is not unlike what happened with coconut water several years ago, Fortuna suggested. "Coconut water was a staple drink in South America long before it was marketed and became a success story in this country."

That's a model of how to bring something with a proven multicultural appeal to the American palate, he added. "We're doing much the same with flower botanicals, taking what's been appreciated in other parts of the globe, and making it available here in a flower-plus-fruit combination that's both novel and familiar at the same time and, above all, tastes great," Fortuna concluded. **BI**

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