



If You Can't Beat 'Em, Eat 'Em Like Junk Food

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AN ABUNDANCE OF EMPTY CALORIES

Doritos, Lunchables, Skittles. We are living in an age of cheap calories and nutritionally vapid foods. Through extraordinary advances in food chemistry, processed food companies are now expert at adding hidden sugar, salt and fat, scientifically formulating foods that we will crave. Meanwhile, marketing for junk food has become just as sophisticated, with each product trumpeted through TV advertisements, radio jingles, event sponsorships, fast food restaurant tie-ins and more. Children and teens are particularly targeted for food advertising, since ads are more likely to influence their preferences and they are less likely to think critically about the messages they hear.

As a consequence, the United States faces an unprecedented epidemic of obesity and weight-related illnesses. Currently, 35.7% of American adults are obese, 25 million have type 2 diabetes, and 27 million have chronic heart disease.¹ If the obesity rate fell by just a few percentage points, it is estimated that we would save millions of lives from disease and billions of dollars in healthcare costs. One of the key factors to encouraging weight loss is improved nutrition and healthier diets. However, it is hard to imagine a public health campaign with funding anywhere near the resources held by the food industry. In one study, researchers estimated that the fast food industry spent \$4.2 billion on marketing in 2010. For comparison, the USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion has an annual total budget of \$6.5 *million*.²

In the face of overwhelming volume and superior tactics for junk food advertising, it seems almost impossible to spread the word on more wholesome eating. Besides, healthy foods are boring, and no one wants to hear about foods that are good for you. But what if a nutritious food were to steal a few plays from the junk food marketing handbook?

1 Nelson, Jennifer and Zeratsky, Katherine, "What Will It Take to Reverse the Obesity Epidemic?" Mayo Clinic, published Oct. 3, 2012, accessed Mar. 2, 2013, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/obesity-epidemic/MY02245>

2 Philpott, Tom, "The Fast Food Industry's \$4.2 Billion Marketing Blitz," Grist, published Nov. 9, 2010, accessed Mar. 3, 2013, <http://grist.org/article/food-2010-11-09-the-fast-food-industrys-4-2-billion-marketing-blitz/>

FROM VEGETABLES TO SNACKS

In 2001, Jeffrey Dunn was directing Coca Cola's North and South American sales as president and chief operating officer.³ By 2010, he was pitching venture capitalists on a new venture, one featuring an edgy and satirical marketing campaign with memorable personality and multiple media channels to reach a broad swath of Americans. It included a bold slogan: "Eat 'em like junk food." The product? Dunn was trying to sell baby carrots. This master of food industry marketing was now employing all the old tricks for Bolthouse Farms, where he was CEO.

Bolthouse Farms is the nation's leading seller of baby carrots in the country, with about 1 billion pounds of carrots sold each year.⁴ After sales fell flat a few years ago, the company began to explore ways to boost growth again. They had never marketed baby carrots before, but soon decided that a conventional nutrition-based promotion would not extend their reach enough.

Instead, in a brilliantly subversive strategy, Bolthouse Farms called on people to treat baby carrots like junk food, to think of them as a fun snackable food that you can eat over and over. The "Eat 'Em Like Junk Food" campaign was created by ad agency Crispin Porter + Bogusky, and immediately caught the attention of retailers, kids and soccer moms around the country. Forty-nine carrot producers banded together to form an alliance branded "A Bunch of Carrot Farmers" to back the \$25 million campaign.⁵ The campaign would go on to win three Effie Awards, which recognize the most effective and innovative marketing efforts of the year.

3 Moss, Michael, "The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food," New York Times, published Feb. 20, 2013, accessed Mar. 3, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/24/magazine/the-extraordinary-science-of-junk-food.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

4 McGray, Douglas, "How Carrots Became the New Junk Food," Fast Company, published Mar. 22, 2011, accessed Mar. 3, 2013, <http://www.fastcompany.com/1739774/how-carrots-became-new-junk-food>

5 Schultz, E.J., "Bolthouse Farms CMO Takes Page from Snack-Food Giants," Ad Age, published Oct. 27, 2010, accessed Mar. 3, 2013, <http://adage.com/article/cmo-interviews/bolthouse-farms-cmo-takes-page-snack-food-giants/146743/>

THE DRAWER OF DEATH

Bolthouse Farms began as a commercial vegetable farm in western Michigan in 1915. By 1950, they had become a leading carrot supplier to processors such as Campbell, Heinz and Gerber. After nearly 100 years of growth, the company watched as carrot sales began stagnating and declining at the end of the '90s. From 1999 to 2009, fresh carrot consumption per capita fell steadily from 9.25 to 7.93 lbs, even as overall produce sales were growing.⁶

Company executives were left puzzling as to why. After all, research showed that among vegetables, carrots were the top choice of American consumers, and most said that they were eating them as frequently as before.⁷ Further research revealed that while today's consumers claim they like preparing and eating fresh vegetables and fruits, they are usually pressed for time and resort to snack foods. It may seem an oxymoron, but 74% of consumers said they were trying to eat healthier while snacking more than ever, with snacking playing a significant role in daily nutrition.⁸ Baby carrots should be a perfect solution for these needs: a healthy, convenient snack. However, despite these positive sentiments, it was clear that people were still buying fewer carrots than before. What was happening to the carrots after purchasing?

It was time to dive into real kitchens. Crispin Porter + Bogusky conducted studies of families and their eating habits, paying close attention to what was eaten most frequently and where it was placed. They found that location played an enormous role in whether a food was consumed, and items that were visible on open shelves were eaten much more regularly than foods that were not.⁹ The vegetable crisper was particularly unloved—opaque, hidden and far below eye level. Kids avoided the vegetable drawer and mothers associated it with time and preparation.

6 Reese, Bryan, "Diggin' Up Baby Carrots," Bolthouse Farms, presented at the 6th Biennial Childhood Obesity Conference, Jun. 28-30, 2011, accessed Mar. 23, 2013, <http://www.cce.csus.edu/conferences/childobesity/11/uploads/Reese%20COC-clips.pdf>

7 Crispin Porter + Bogusky, "Baby Carrots: Turning Carrots into Junk Food," 2011 Jay Chiat Awards, accessed Mar. 23, 2013, http://www.jaychiatawards.com/documents/winners2011/gold_cpb_bolthousefarms.pdf

8 Reese, op. cit.

9 Crispin, op. cit.

Unfortunately, that was where baby carrots were being placed. People still liked and bought carrots, but they weren't getting eaten. Bolthouse Farms would not need to change people's perceptions about carrots; they would need to change people's behavior.

The company began brainstorming their goals for a baby carrots marketing campaign. Past food commodity marketing campaigns ("Got Milk?", "Pork, the Other White Meat") have yielded immense returns, and Bolthouse Farms was willing to pour significant capital into the project. Their primary objectives were to change the way people think about baby carrots, moving their position from a vegetable to a snack, and to grow total carrot consumption, through larger and more frequent purchases. In a media environment saturated with junk food advertising, they were vying for the enduring relevance of baby carrots, and wanted to inject carrots into the national conversation as a fun, savvy food. This was to be a campaign that appealed to impulse and entertainment value, not responsibility or health.

PLAYING THE GAME

Bolthouse Farms realized that they not only needed to sell baby carrots, they needed to sell Baby Carrots the brand. They created an industry marketing board, a coalition of carrot growers that styled themselves as "A Bunch of Carrot Farmers." The campaign's focus would be the promotion of carrots in general, not Bolthouse Farms. Since Bolthouse Farms sold carrots under a variety of brands and private labels, they felt it would be more beneficial to promote baby carrots, rather than their brand specifically. The industry-wide focus also helped Bolthouse Farms convince other carrot producers to pool resources and help fund the marketing campaign.

After hiring Crispin Porter + Bogusky, a prominent marketing firm with ties to major brands like Coca-Cola, Applebee's and Hulu, the next step was to launch a massive integrated marketing effort: television, outdoor media, public relations, social media, digital/mobile platforms, in-store

promotions, in-store displays and revamped packaging (Fig. 1). To beat junk food marketers at their own game, the winning strategy would be to borrow some of their tactics.

Display 'Em Like Junk Food

If Bolthouse Farms wanted baby carrots to be treated like junk food, they would need to look like junk food. Carrots are typically packaged in clear cellophane bags, with minimal logos, writing or graphics on them. As an alternative, Crispin Porter + Bogusky created a series of colorful, upright packages that mimicked chip bags (Fig. 2). The “futuristic” design had a black background with a UFO-esque motif and science fiction-style fonts; the “extreme” design came with neon colors, text shaped like lightning bolts and an alien cartoon character; the “indulgent” design featured a print similar to a Louis Vuitton handbag, with a macron on the o in “carrōts” to give the bag chic, upscale flair. Crispin Porter + Bogusky also looked into getting foil linings to match the interiors of snack bag, but the costs were prohibitive.

These different styles of packaging indicate that Bolthouse Farms was targeting several distinct audiences: kids, teens and women. These audiences matter because moms make the bulk of grocery purchasing decisions and children's consumption habits are more easily influenced than adults. This broad, multi-target approach was further reinforced by the diversity of the marketing vehicles discussed below.

Once the baby carrots were packaged like junk food, they needed to be displayed like junk food. But though the carrots now looked like junk food, they couldn't actually be placed in the snack section. Since the carrots could not escape the refrigerated aisles, it was time to remake the produce area itself. Bolthouse Farms installed bright orange banners above the produce shelves with the proclamation “Baby Carrots: The Original Orange Doodles” (Fig. 3), with the slogan “Eat 'Em Like Junk Food” and BabyCarrots.com listed underneath. In case customers didn't look up to see the banner, smaller shelf cards located near the price tags call even more attention to the

baby carrots, while repeating the “Original Orange Doodles” tag line. Against the more muted greens and whites of the produce aisle, the carrot display stands out for its striking colors and its tongue-in-cheek advertising.

Promote 'Em Like Junk Food

Crispin Porter + Bogusky began promoting baby carrots with “Snacktacular TV” ads designed to showcase each type of packaging:

- In the “futuristic” ad, a robotic voice narrates “the future of crunch” in what appears to be a scene from a science fiction movie.¹⁰ A blindfolded man is strapped down with high tech equipment and faces an alien firing squad leader, who is eating a carrot. As the robotic voice says, “Initiate crazy, expensive special effects,” the man explodes into baby carrots and the ad concludes, “Futuristic cliché complete.”
- In the “extreme” ad, high octane rock music by “Karrüt Krüünch” is punctuated by voices yelling “Baby carrots, yeah!”¹¹ A man wearing a skater helmet is shown flying down the side of a mountain in a shopping cart, while a woman wearing a bandolier filled with baby carrots fires a machine gun that shoots—you guessed it—more baby carrots. The background voices yell, “Baby carrots, extreme impossible stunts!” and the man catches one of the carrots with his teeth. He lands successfully, and for good measure, an “extreme pterodactyl” flies into the scene.
- Finally, the “indulgent” ad employs a sexy woman in a sleek black dress, sensually eating baby carrots with smooth jazz music.¹² This ad features interplay between a sexy female

10 Crispin Bogusky + Porter, “Futuristic Snacktacular TV,” accessed Mar. 26, 2013, <http://www.cpbgroup.com/#clients/baby-carrots/snacktacular-tv/futuristic>

11 Crispin Porter + Bogusky, “Extreme Snacktacular TV,” accessed Mar. 26, 2013, <http://www.cpbgroup.com/#clients/baby-carrots/snacktacular-tv/extreme>

12 Crispin Porter + Bogusky, “Indulgent Snacktacular TV,” accessed Mar. 26, 2013, <http://www.cpbgroup.com/#clients/baby-carrots/snacktacular-tv/indulgent>

voice and a deep male voice that counters with less serious remarks. For instance, when the female voice says dramatically, "Feel that feeling, you know the feeling!" the male voice comments, "Overt, sexual innuendo." When the female voice repeats a line that's already been said, the male voice responds, "You already said that." Throughout, the camera shows slow pans of the woman eating baby carrots, with gentle cascades of carrots falling around her. The ad ends with the woman saying, "Ooooh baby...carrots."

While each of these ads had its own theme, angle and target demographic, they all shared a tone of irreverence and self-awareness that the ad was over-the-top. These ads knowingly parody the extreme special effects and sex appeal that junk food ads typically use, and they let viewers in on the joke by openly acknowledging the absurdity of these marketing tactics. In all likelihood, no one was actually persuaded that baby carrots are extreme or sexy, but the satirical humor was enough to convince people that baby carrots could be hip and edgy after all. The ads play the ultimate irony card by mocking the absurdity of their competitors' ads, while using the same techniques to win over consumers.

Billboards were used to promote the baby carrots campaign outside of the home (Fig. 4). Each included a slogan that simultaneously positioned carrots as junk food while acknowledging the humor in doing so: "Try Juicing a Cheese Puff," "Still in Extreme Carrot Flavor," "Binge Better," and "Eat 'Em Like Junk Food." The ads were mostly unadorned, other than plain drawings of carrots. For the intrigued, the BabyCarrots.com website was displayed in the corner for those who wanted more information.

Perhaps the most archetypical form of junk food marketing is the movie tie-in, embodied by McDonald's Happy Meal toys and cereal box promotions. Bolthouse Farms followed suit by partnering with *Hop*, a live-action and animated film for children. The movie tie-in was advertised prominently in a limited-edition package design (Fig. 5). E.B., the film's cartoon rabbit protagonist, was splashed on the package with the caption, "Paid Celebrity Endorsement." The rest

of the package included announcements like “Big-Time Movie Promotion Packaging!,” “Here’s the Giant Movie Logo,” and “Check Out Our Cross Promotion,” messages which parody the usual forms of Hollywood advertising. So while the cartoon character may have been attractive to children, the way that this package lampoons conventional movie tie-ins gives it a much broader adult appeal, and reinforces its image as the alternative junk food.

Socialize 'Em Like Junk Food

Bolthouse Farms not only wanted to change people’s behavior with baby carrots, they wanted to build a community of loyal fans to help spread their message. Following the example of junk food brands, they incorporated social media, videos and games into a website to encourage interaction. Rather than rebrand their existing website, Bolthouse Farms launched an entirely new domain, BabyCarrots.com (Fig. 6), in keeping with the campaign’s desire to promote the general carrot industry rather than the Bolthouse Farms name. The website served as the core of the campaign, providing a launchpad for the digital marketing elements outlined below. It also provided more information for people who learned about the campaign through TV ads, in-store displays or other offline methods.

The flash-driven site was embedded in the side of a baby carrot, and touted the new junk food-style packaging, a “carrot-crunch-powered” video game and a “Munchies” video series. With bright colors, cartoon graphics and a focus on entertainment, it has a very different feel from the more education and health-driven Bolthouse Farms website. Unfortunately, the Baby Carrots site has been updated with new content since its initial release, so detailed information about the site’s former structure and content is unavailable.

To further enhance the reputation of baby carrots as junk food, Crispin Porter + Bogusky developed a 10-episode web series titled “Munchies.”¹³ Each clip featured “junk food expert/stock

13 Crispin Porter + Bogusky, “Munchies Webfilms,” accessed Mar. 30, 2013, <http://www.cpbgroup.com/#clients/baby-carrots/munchies-webfilms>

boy” Chip and his sidekick Abdul, and ran 30-60 seconds long, the length of an average commercial (Fig. 7). Chip and Abdul are employees at a grocery store, and their “snackspert” knowledge gives them the authority to give advice on baby carrots. Some videos feature tips on how to best eat baby carrots (as a reward for doing push-ups, to blow off steam when you’re angry by pretending the carrots are your enemies), some videos poke fun at other snack foods (elves touching your cookies is gross, unlike the pristine handling of baby carrots), and some simply provide amusing looks at the lives of the characters (Abdul calling home to Bangladesh to tell his mother he is a “wealthy software engineer with many beautiful wives”). Unlike the TV ads, which outright copy the cliches of junk food advertising, Chip and Abdul are totally earnest in their love for baby carrots and show it in novel ways. The resulting video series is witty, relatable, unique and never outwardly salesy, the perfect vehicle to encourage people to click share and forward.

For this campaign, Bolthouse Farm launched new Facebook and Twitter accounts under the handles “BabyCarrots.” Unfortunately, both accounts are no longer active and have been deleted, perhaps due to limited management resources and the desire to consolidate activity under the Bolthouse Farms accounts. From old screenshots though, it is clear that the Facebook and Twitter accounts employed the sassy and irreverent tone that characterize the rest of the campaign. The accounts would frequently challenge and taunt other junk food brands, with remarks like “Asked @Cheetos to take it out back to settle who is the OG orange snack. #NoShow” and “Yo, @skittles. Taste our rainbow. Of orange.”¹⁴

Finally, every junk food brand needs a wholly superfluous, gimmicky video game to cement its reputation for off-the-walls entertainment. Enter Xtreme Xrunch Kart, the world’s first ever crunch-powered game (Fig. 8). This game was available for free through iTunes, and featured a rocket-propelled shopping cart that players navigated through obstacle courses. To boost the

14 Crispin Porter + Bogusky, “Babycarrots.com,” accessed Mar. 27, 2013, <http://www.cpbgroup.com/#clients/baby-carrots/babycarrots.com/interactive-reel>

cart's speed and perform aerial tricks, players must make crunching noises by eating baby carrots in front of the device's microphone. So to win the game, you have to purchase the product advertised, an ingenious way to encourage sales.

Distribute 'Em Like Junk Food

To expand their reach with teens and showcase the benefits of carrot snacks to school administrators, Bolthouse Farms installed customized baby carrot vending machines at two high schools (Fig. 9). The machines were wholly sponsored by Bolthouse Farms, and sold packs of carrots for 50 cents each.

Despite the presence of competing junk food vending machines, the response from students was resoundingly positive. One student said, "I think they're cute," and suggested the carrots even seem to taste better. "I think they're, like, more moist almost."¹⁵ While this remark may have been a sad reflection of our reliance on packaging as an arbiter of taste, it was still great news for nutrition advocates, who hailed the 32-calorie carrot packs as a landmark development. Bolthouse Farms' redesigned packaging and branding had succeeded in making carrots more appealing, and not just as a dinner plate vegetable. To further drive home the message, the schools developed lesson plans around carrot marketing, asking students to brainstorm ways to encourage their peers to eat more vegetables.

A NEW ERA FOR HEALTHY FOODS

The "Eat 'Em Like Junk Food" campaign debuted in September 2010 in two test markets: Syracuse and Cincinnati. Just two months later, sales were up 10-12% in these test markets compared to the year before.¹⁶ In comparison, control groups showed minimal growth or slight declines. The

15 Aubrey, Allison, "Extreme Baby Carrots: An Experiment in Marketing," NPR, published Oct. 4, 2010, accessed, Mar. 24, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130321785>

16 McGray, op. cit.

vending machines were selling 80-90 packs per week, and school principals from other districts were inquiring about machines for their own schools. The test market results far exceeded Bolthouse Farms' expectations, with baby carrot sales boosting the whole carrot category.

BabyCarrots.com received over 60,000 visits in the two months after its launch, with visitors lingering an average of 9½ minutes before leaving, an extraordinary level of engagement.¹⁷ The Baby Carrots YouTube videos received 1.3 million plays, the Facebook page attracted 3,300 Likes and 12,568 page views, and the Twitter account had 827 followers. These social media growth figures are impressive by any standard, even more so for a commodity product that is simply carrots with no additives. Meanwhile, despite a US-targeted release for iPhone, Xtreme Xrunch Kart was downloaded in over 75 countries, indicating universal interest and popularity.¹⁸

Crispin Porter + Bogusky calculated that the campaign generated \$13.8 million of earned media and over 585 million publicity impressions, with coverage by the New York Times, Fox News, ABC, NBC, CNN, NPR, Fast Company, USA Today and more.¹⁹ Bloggers from the Huffington Post, Jezebel, Technorati and Eatocracy demonstrated the wide appeal of the campaign's edgy, satirical approach. International media channels picked up the campaign story, with articles published in the Belfast Telegraph, Wired UK, Toronto's Globe and Mail and Cologne's Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger. Produce industry trade magazines supported the campaign and its alliance of farmers, with coverage in the The Packer, Produce News, Fresh!, Food CEO, Food Service and American Agricultural Law Association. The campaign was even mentioned on Saturday Night Live's Weekend Update segment. The widespread awareness and multipronged marketing approach outlined above were credited for driving sales.

At the campaign's launch, Bolthouse Farms was held by private equity firm Madison Dearborn Partners, LLC., so exact sales figures are difficult to come by for that period. However, it is likely

17 Reese, op. cit.

18 Crispin Porter + Bogusky, "Xtreme Xrunch Kart," accessed Mar. 27, 2013, <http://www.cpbgroup.com/#clients/baby-carrots/xtreme-xrunch-kart-app>

19 Crispin, op. cit.

that the company's rising sales led to it becoming attractive enough for acquisition. In July 2012, Campbell announced that it would be acquiring Bolthouse Farms for \$1.55 billion.²⁰ The company's senior management remained in place and operations for Bolthouse Farms continued as a separate division. In fiscal year 2013, Campbell forecasts the Bolthouse Farms operations will contribute approximately \$750 million in sales.²¹ The Bolthouse Farms fresh packaged foods and premium refrigerated drinks are expected to complement Campbell's V8 beverages and strengthen their market share in healthy prepared foods.

In the meantime, Bolthouse Farms continues to generate new carrot products and presentations. Recently, the company introduced Shakedown, or baby carrots with a packet of all-natural seasonings. Inspired by the flavorings on Doritos, the Shakedowns come in three flavors (ranch, salsa and chili lime), with easy-tear packets of herbs that you shake into the bag of carrots. For baby boomers, this is product reminiscent of Shake 'n' Bake, which many associate with their mothers and home cooking.

The “Eat 'Em Like Junk Food” campaign was a wild success for Bolthouse Farms in terms of sales and publicity impressions. But more importantly, the image of carrots was changed to an alternative truth, one with the power to change people's behavior. For the first time, baby carrots are hip, fun and junky, with an appeal that has nothing to do with “rational” message. If parents, educators and fresh food marketers can learn from the lessons of Bolthouse Farms, there may yet be hope for our nation's obesity crisis.

20 Campbell Soup Company, “Campbell to Acquire Bolthouse Farms,” press release, published Jul. 9, 2012, accessed, Mar. 24, 2013, <http://investor.campbellsoupcompany.com/phoenix.zhtml?c=88650&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=1712573>

21 Campbell Soup Company, “Campbell Reports Second Quarter Results,” press release, published Feb. 15, 2013, accessed, Mar. 24, 2013, <http://investor.campbellsoupcompany.com/phoenix.zhtml?c=88650&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=1785535&highlight>

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Bolthouse Farms Integrated Consumer Marketing Campaign

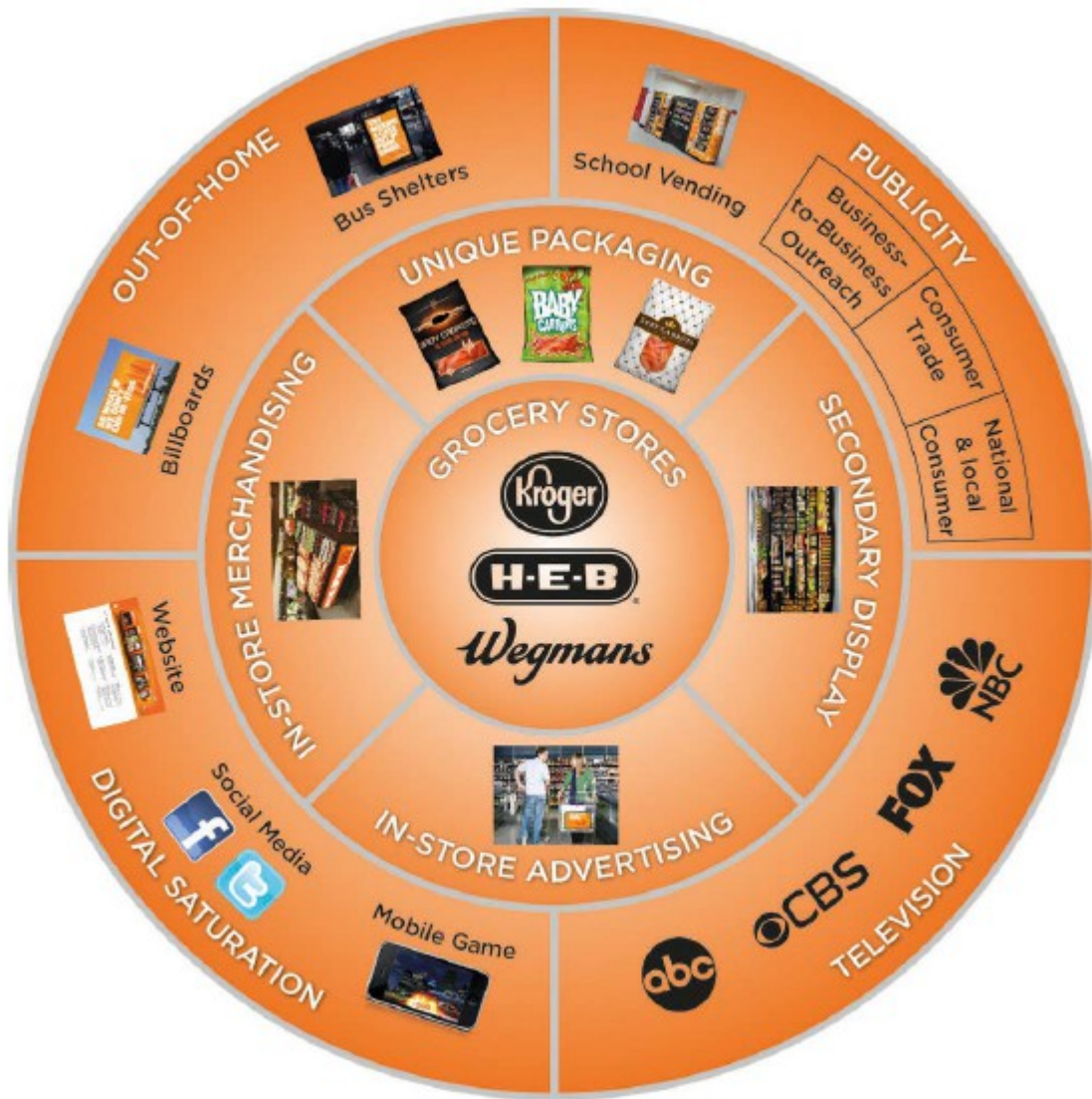


Figure 2: New Packaging Designs for Baby Carrots



Figure 3: In-Store Display for Baby Carrots



Figure 4: Billboards for Baby Carrots



Figure 5: Hop Movie Tie-In Package



Figure 6: BabyCarrots.com Website



Figure 7: Munchies Web Series



Figure 8: Xtreme Krunch Kart, iPhone Video Game



Figure 9: Customized Baby Carrot Vending Machine

