



Photograph by Jeff Kearns

Zenfully Yours

Once the packaging schtick of organic farmers and soulful, independent health food producers, the mind/body/spirit marketing niche has a new pal: Madison Avenue. Is nothing sacred?

By Justin Berton

THE CEREAL AISLE INSIDE Albertson's on Capitol Expressway is a scary place. Down on the lower shelves--the ones that are eye-level to a 5-year-old--a vampire with slicked-back hair peers out over a bowl of chocolate pebbles. A few boxes to the left, a sugar-smacked bear flings spoonfuls of slop. And in between, a crazed rabbit is frozen in a

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hyperactive gaze.

Up on the top shelf, though, the cereal speaks to the adults. Brands boast about high fiber! One box pictures trim-looking adults jogging along the rim of a lake. Even Grape Nuts asks potential consumers to "Discover the Energy."

And among these top-shelf breakfasts-in-a-box, one stands out. The box is gently swathed in strokes of baby blue and soft yellow. Near the top of the box, the silhouette of a woman's body raises her arms heavenward, in victory. It looks like a dream. Its name is Harmony.

I reach for it. On the back of the box a middle-aged woman wearing a cable-knit sweater stands on a seashore and, again, she is raising her arms above her head. To some, like me, she is indicating a field goal has been scored. To others, she is celebrating her empowerment.

On the back of the box, in dramatic italics, the ingredients--soy, folic acid, calcium--are accounted for, along with the cereal's philosophy: *Meeting the nutritional needs of women is what Harmony cereal is all about.*

I say what-the-hey and toss it in the cart. A few steps later I notice a new cereal from the New Organics Co. They sell a generic-looking type of frosted flakes that are, according to the box, "Organically Certified." The top of the box suggests it will feed more than just my stomach--"Mind. Body. Spirit." Jeez, I say. Mind, body *and* spirit? I toss it in next to the Harmony.

Now that I'm aware of the spiritual movement taking place inside Albertson's, I'm curious to see how many products will deliver me down the path to solace. Over in the tissue aisle, Puffs sells dispensers that contain

"inspiration." Dexatrim, the appetite suppressant, offers "Dexatrim Natural in Green Tea Formula." The box shows two leaves swirling into a ball to form what looks like the yin-yang symbol.

On the deoderant rack, Secret is selling a new sweat-stopper called Genuine. Genuine allows you to "carry peace within your being. [Because] With grace, you accept what you have become." Another Secret deoderant, named Optimism, offers its own locution for living: "There isn't time for trivial things to bring down your refreshing energy--Optimism will suit your life."

To drink, Tazo Tea, "The Reincarnation of Tea," claims, "Tea enlightenment: Tazo premium teas and herbal infusions, blended with artistry bordering on magical, will soothe your soul." And Dixie Cups now sells "Expressions Cups," disposable cups that offer words of wisdom. Reads one, "The eyes are the windows to the soul."

I'm looking for it now and I see it everywhere. I come across Depends, the diaper for those who've lost bladder control, and I see it has two new shelf competitors: Serenity and Poise. Serenity keeps you dry, but Poise allows you "The freedom to be yourself."

So what I want to know is, with Harmony in my cart and Poise in my hand, who stuck their Zen in my peanut butter?



Driven to Drink:

Longtime producers of organic foods and health food store staples say they resent the encroachment of large, mainstream corporations like Dixie into their niche.

Photograph by George Sakkestad



Take Us Om

PROFESSOR
RAJEEV Batra,

of the University of Michigan, knows who's responsible for all of this. He's co-authored four books on advertising and is considered a guru when it comes to tracking advertising fads and branding techniques. While Batra says he isn't aware of any hard data that proves spirituality-laced products are blazing a path to higher profits, his own observations have noticed a warm 'n' fuzzy shift in advertising today. He suspects, not surprisingly, that that demographic gorilla named baby boomers--some 70 million people between the ages of 40 and 60--is guiding this long, hard look into the mirror. Batra says any shift in mainstream advertising copy can be attributed to a shift in the collective conscious of the average baby boomer.

"What's going on in their lives, and in their heads and in their hearts, is what Madison Avenue plays to," Batra says. "research suggests as we get older we become less concerned with the success of our careers and begin thinking in terms of the success of our spirituality."

And oh, how spirituality has become successful these days.

According to a poll taken by the 2-year-old *Spirituality and Health Magazine*, more people now consider themselves "spiritual" as opposed to "religious." In short, saying one is religious, the poll indicates, gives people the heebie-jeebies, while defining one- self as "spiritual" evokes a sort of vast worldliness. Being spiritual is taking a walk in the woods on weekends and rolling out the sticky mat at

lunchtime; being religious means going to a church, getting on your knees and praying to a statue.

Yoga, as it turns out, is experiencing a wild and well-reported-on resurgence in popularity--for immediate proof one need only look to the new Monday night Yoga Night at the downtown nightclub The Usual. Where Professor Batra would cite the yoga boom as an excellent example of the spiritually deprived baby boomers looking for a few answers just before the gig of life ends, *Time* magazine suggested earlier this year that our hectic high-tech exterior has driven us humans inside, seeking an inner silence.

"In this modern maelstrom, yoga's tendency to stasis and silence seems at first insane, then inspired," the magazine reported. "The notion of bodies at rest becoming souls at peace is reactionary, radical and liberating. If it cures nagging backache, swell. But isn't it bliss just to sit this one out, to freeze-frame the frenzy, to say no to all that and om to what may be beyond it, or within ourselves?"

In response to the popularity of yoga, Madison Avenue was quick to hear the chant of cash registers ringing. In just the past few months, according to *Advertising Age*, brands such as Nike and DaimlerChrysler Jeep have featured their product users practicing yoga--and the ads didn't appear in *Yoga Journal*, a publishing juggernaut currently enjoying massive popularity and sky-high ad rates. A new Oil of Olay television commercial focuses on a mother stretching out on a yoga mat while feeding her baby. The product helps Mom enjoy a "complete life."

Readers of the current issue of *Men's Journal* may have noticed a full-page Saks Fifth Avenue ad which pictures a male CEO-type sitting on top of his desk, folded up in a lotus

position.

The ad was a good one. As a captain of industry, the CEO was obviously drained from competing in the cutthroat capitalist world. And here he sat, able to meditate away into a place of inner comfort, while wearing Saks Fifth Avenue clothes.

Soul Proprietors

IN OAKLAND, BURT ALPER, 32, is a strategy director and founding partner of Catchword, a national firm that creates names for products. Alper was born and raised in Berkeley, the self-proclaimed son of Bobos--short for the Bohemian Bourgeoisie--and picked up his MBA at Harvard Business School.

Alper's staff is beefed up with linguists who can turn a phrase on a dime and get a dollar in return. Catchword named products like the Spalding Infusion basketball, Adobe Photoshop Elements, Dreamery Ice Cream and, recently, the Oasis health bar for women.

Two years ago, Clif Bar had released the Luna Bar for women, and Alper's company was quickly hired by rival Balance Bar to name a competitor. Alper and his crew chewed on the new product, interviewed its makers and took it through the weeks-long naming process. The team wanted to steer clear of giving it an overly feminine moniker, yet still convey "serenity and relaxation."

"It had to be for the woman who was healthy, energy-conscious, somewhat spiritual in a Zen sort of way," Alper says. "It's for the woman who is a multitasker, a woman who could bring home the bacon and bake it, too. It needed to give that lift, like a cup of coffee, but without the negative connotation associated with caffeine. And the word *oasis* symbolized that safe-haven for her. It said,

'Even though your world could be crazy all around you, this could give you that pickup--but on a natural theme.'" (Since Oasis arrived on the market, another brand, named Essentials, entered the female sports-bar genre.)

Alper agrees that brands and advertising campaigns are moving toward an inner-self ethos, but he sees it mostly in the New Agey Bay Area, compared to outside markets.

Still, Alper adds, he's hearing frequent requests from even his technology clients to give their products more melodic names. After a decade of Ciscos and Compaqs, it was time to put the Buddha in the Machine.

One tech company that came to Catchword offered a service that tracked where specific web users traveled on the Internet. Through interviews with company executives, Alper and his colleagues learned that the company offered something "other people couldn't see." Since the product multitasked and wasn't just a one-task pony, the name had to reflect its broad capacity.

After several index searches and creative meetings, a colleague told the story of the Asian custom of reading tea leaves. According to Alper, the custom calls for an elder to dry out tea leaves, sprinkle them to the ground and, depending on the way they fall, read the future.

Since the client's technology looked into the future, sort of, and the customer asked for anything but technical, Alper's team suggested the name Tea Leaf Technology. Approval from the client was instantaneous. "It doesn't sound like a technology company," Alper says, "and that was important to them."

Alper says that it's common for popular advertising fads and their products to endure a

backlash. Starbucks, Nike and Apple Computers all suffered from becoming *too* cool for their own good. In one era, sugar-heavy cereals could be coveted, then undergo a death-by-calcium. I asked him if he foresaw a market response *against* the Zen-in-cereal, and Alper chirped up with a better idea.

"Instead of a backlash, maybe the next generation will ask for cereal infused with echinacea? Or ginseng?"



Photograph by Jeff Kearns

Food for Thought: General Mills has leapt into the spiritual marketing fray with Harmony, a cereal designed for women. A bowl of Harmony contains higher amounts of calcium and iron than regular cereal, but has 13 grams of sugar.

In Harmony's Way

ONLY 40 PERCENT of Americans went to a place of worship last year, but just about everybody ate something. And most likely it was a brand item that they felt an emotional connection to.

So, do Americans really believe in spirituality? Probably not. Do they believe in cereal? You betcha.

But as products that are geared toward our

mind and body start jumping from the shelves of Whole Foods and into the Albertson's on Capitol Expressway, they've still got a long way to go before they gain broad mainstream acceptance.

Megan Nightingale, assistant marketing director for Harmony, says the driving force of the product was always meeting women's nutritional needs, just like it said on the box, and also meeting women's needs "on a day-to-day basis." Harmony was "years and years in the making" and was munched on by hundreds of focus groups before it hit the market in January. Nothing inside or outside the box hasn't been scrutinized more than a thousand times.

I asked Nightingale if Harmony was developed specifically to tap into the spirituality vibe. She took a few seconds to ponder the question.

"I don't know that Harmony was designed to speak to spirituality specifically," she said slowly. "But it does acknowledge today's women and where they're at--and certainly a part of what is important to women today is spirituality."

As I scribbled down this quote, a pause fell between us and I could hear Nightingale rethink what she had just said. She perked up. "But I want to make it dead clear that we did not design Harmony as a *spiritual cereal* per se."

That said, General Mills is working hard to make sure Harmony lands in a lot of shopping carts, regardless of why.

Earlier this year, as the official story of Harmony goes, a woman in Santa Monica named Marsh Engle mourned the passing of her mother. At the funeral Engle was taken aback by how many people commented on

her mother's compassion and personal strength. "But I'm not sure she ever saw that in herself," Engle now says.

Motivated and inspired, Engle set out to create "Amazing Woman's Day," a national day where women could just "stop to recognize how wonderful they actually are."

As Engle planned it, she envisioned meeting places inside shopping malls in 10 cities across the country where women could converge, listen to motivational speakers and participate in seminars.

Though Engle had more passion than proceeds, she says she went to General Mills and gave them the chance to sponsor the event. In the end, General Mills underwrote the entire nationwide event at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars. In return, Harmony set up booths for promoting the cereal and attached its name to everything in sight.

One such item was the "Harmony Wisdom Wall," which asked women to write inspirational messages. As General Mills put it on the promotional website, the Harmony Wisdom Wall was a collection of musings, "'food for thought' from women to women." Each city had a piece of the wall and, after the day was over, the 10 pieces were flown to Dallas and connected to make one big wall of inspiration. For each message posted, Harmony pledged to donate \$1 toward a local women's charity.

By Engle's account, the day was a booming success, thanks largely to General Mills. A lot of cereal was shared and presumably eaten, and afterward Engle didn't have to return to her old job as a promotional marketer for the entertainment industry. Instead, General Mills continued its support, which has allowed Engle to work year-round on her project.

When I asked Engle if she ate Harmony (despite the cereal's high mineral content, 60 percent of the recommended daily allowance [RDA] of calcium and 50 percent of the RDA of iron, each serving contains 13 grams of sugar) she gave an enthusiastic yes. "Their cereal is a wonderful cereal with a lot of good ingredients for women." She went on to say the cereal was "well received" and that "energetically the cereal is what we're all about."

After learning of Engle's background in marketing, my inner reporter sensed Engle might have been brought in by General Mills to push their cereal. Engle told me her mother died in 2001, which would have been just weeks before Amazing Woman's Day took place--a quick turnaround to organize a national party. With some reservation, I asked her again if General Mills hadn't planned the whole thing and come up with her story, and she insisted that she was motivated only by her mother's death to create the day of womanly recognition. General Mills, it turned out, just happened to be the right product at the right time.

"Now I'm working on it full time," she said. "They're [Harmony] working with us again and you'll see us next year."

Garden of Eatin'

THIS YEAR THE BEST place to find the food that appeals to the soul, outside of Whole Foods and Wild Oats--two large stores known in the organic food industry as the "Super Naturals"--will be inside Albertson's, the first mainstream grocery store to carry products from the ever-expanding New Organics Co. It's no fluke. The company was founded in 1997 by two grocery store executives who had one thing in mind: "To bring organic foods to the mainstream," says

Anthony Zolezzi, President.

And it's certainly a good time to be an organic food company treading in the mainstream. According to the Organic Foods Association, consumption of their synthetic-free products has grown 20 percent every year for the past 11 years and retail sales of organics in 2001 are projected at \$9.3 billion; by 2005, sales are expected to reach nearly \$20 billion.

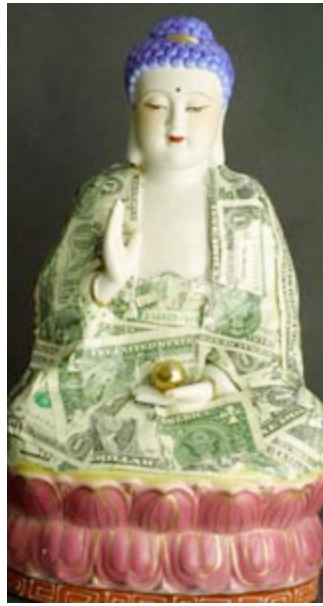
The New Organics Co., for its part, offers pastas, corns, cereals, mustard, condiments and a new line of children's foods--all of them made from products with minimal pesticide residue, Zolezzi says. And, since Zolezzi's company was the first to reach the masses outside the Super Naturals, it's also the first to get a whiff of within-the-industry criticism.

The push into the middle ground has angered some longtime organic-foodies who complain that the "industrialization" of organics will only lead to the oft-feared "organic Twinkie" and compromise the principles of eating healthy, all in the name of earning the coveted "Certified Organic" seal. Players like the New Organics Co. that tout a product for the "Mind/Body/Spirit" are viewed as the greedy uncle who stole the secret family recipe, watered it down and sold it to the masses. Mind. Body. Profit.

Zolezzi says his company hasn't heard of any backlash from the smaller organic companies since the New Organics Co. arrived, yet he accepts the market tension that exists.

"There's always going to be some people in any industry who are unhappy," he says. "But we haven't heard anything like that. Look, the bottom line is that everyone has the same goals. Everyone wants a safer planet, a cleaner earth and healthier food. Doesn't

matter how it happens, who profits or how it gets to market--just as long as we all meet those goals."



Eaten Up

A FEW SUNDAY MORNINGS ago, I slumbered into the Barnes & Noble bookstore on Almaden Expressway near Highway 85, looking to meet a goal of my own. I needed coffee. I made a beeline for the Starbucks Cafe in the back. Fuzzy-headed and groggy and far, far away from any locally owned

coffee store, I took my place at the back of a single-file line, behind 10 other caffeine junkies.

Now, there is no denying that Starbucks has become the decal for *mainstream*. A man wearing Gap khakis, a Gap shirt and Nike running shoes stood in front of me. And there was another guy dressed just like him a few dudes in front of him.

In my grumpy haze, I wondered why more people weren't working behind the counter. It was Sunday morning, good God.

As I waited, I looked to the right of the cashier's stand and noticed a large yellow poster advertising a new Starbucks product: "Zen Dream Tea." Next to the cash register, in point-of-purchase placing, were a few boxes of the new Zen Dream Tea.

I studied the new product as the line moved forward. If I drink the tea, I'll have Zen, yeah? I'll have dreams? I'll have Zen dreams? What the hell is a Zen dream, anyway? And

can it be purchased?

I was curious enough to try.

"I'll have one large Zen Dream Tea, please."

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