

GROCERY HEADQUARTERS

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Hopping down THE SEASONAL AISLE

Candy companies and other makers of Easter items are rolling out new products, promotions and packaging.

BY NORA CALEY

While consumers are just recovering from the Christmas rush, candy companies are gearing up for the arrival of the Easter bunny.

Easter is the second biggest sales holiday behind Halloween, according to the National Confectioners Association (NCA), based in Washington, DC. Seasonal confectionery products make up about 25% of the total confectionery sales.

This year there is a seven week spread between Valentine's Day, another hot candy holiday, and Easter, providing extra time for promotion. "The additional time allows for extended merchandising for the season and even in a down economy the extended selling period creates an atmosphere for strong sales," says Jenn Ellek, director of trade marketing and communications for the NCA. "The more marketing days in between major confectionery holidays, the better."

MORE SELLING TIME

The extra time between Valentine's Day and Easter also helps with sell through. Rob Auerbach, president of Candyrific, LLC, based in Louisville, Ky., says retailers remember whether they sold all of a manufacturer's products. "If they bought 20,000 products and sold 20,000 they say, 'Great,' but if they ordered 40,000 and sold 30,000 they say, 'That didn't work so great,' even though they sold 30,000," he says. "The next year the judgment is based on the end game."



Based on orders placed in November and December, sales will be up in 2010. Schneider projects PAAS business will be up 6.5% in volume in 2010. The medium and large kits account for about 70% of consumption. This year the company is offering new kits including Build A Basket, Coloring Creations, Egg Quarium, Mini Monsters and Neon. On the decorating side there are some new cookie icings, such as a fondant that hardens in ten minutes so the baker can stack the cookies. "You have to have something new all the time," Schneider says.

Signature Brands also offers a variety of floor stands, shipper displays, and PDQ trays for the PAAS egg decorating kits and for the cookie decorating products.

Auerbach declined to offer numbers but said Easter 2010 will be a record one for Candyrific. The company sells licensed M&M's and other products, such light up fans and novelty dispensers such as tins. "For Easter, M&M's is the perfect mix," he says. "We put bunny rabbit ears on the characters. Our seasonal business with Mars is excellent." He makes sure retailers also stock bags of M&M's on shelves below the dispensers.

Candyrific offers new items that are not necessarily Easter themed, such as dispensers featuring Miss Green or Mister Blue. Since they do not have bunny ears or pastel colors, these items can remain on the store shelves after the holiday. "That way, you don't have to mark it down," Auerbach says. □