

12.13: Closing Company Case

Little Debbie

Part of your childhood nostalgia may include the Little Debbie Oatmeal Creme Pie, Nutty Buddy, or Swiss Roll. These much-loved products are from the family bakery known as McKee Foods, founded in 1934 by O. D. and Ruth McKee. The company started out as Jack's Cookie Company, a small bakery in Chattanooga, Tennessee, that the McKees bought to provide convenient snacks for school lunches.

Before McKee Foods, bakery or snack cake items were not individually wrapped and sold in a multipack carton. The snack cake brand was named Little Debbie after the founders' granddaughter. Her image is still the famous logo on all packaging. Back in the 1960s, a carton of 12 cakes and cookies had a suggested retail price of 49 cents.

Among the company's brands are Little Debbie, Sunbelt Bakery, Drake's Cakes, and Fieldstone Bakery. The largest brand is Little Debbie, with a wide range of favorites from Apple Fruit Pies to Zebra Cakes. Little Debbie offers seasonal items in rotation, such as Christmas Tree Cakes. Distribution extends to all 50 states, Mexico, and Canada.

The Little Debbie brand of products is widely available in grocery stores, convenience stores, and vending machines. The company has many best-selling products that are pantry mainstays in households throughout the markets they serve. Because the company is such an American icon, the products evoke a sense of nostalgia in many consumers. One such product is Christmas Tree Cakes. Debuting in 1985, the beloved product can be found on shelves to celebrate Christmas and is widely anticipated by consumers around the start of the Thanksgiving season. It is one of the best-selling holiday treats.

For the 2021 holiday season, Little Debbie launched a new Christmas treat, Christmas Tree Cake Ice Cream. To create this new confection, Little Debbie partnered with Hudsonville Ice Cream, a Michigan-based company that has been in business for over 90 years. The new product launched with a great deal of media attention. Public relations were in full swing with articles in newspapers across the country as well as trial of the product on live news broadcasts. Additional headlines appeared in digital media outlets to amplify the message that this new treat was available in stores for the holidays "while supplies last" (Callahan, 2021)

Little Debbie featured the product in its social media with release information on all its channels starting in October, well ahead of the holiday selling season. The company has a robust social media presence with over two million fans on Facebook, 85,000 followers on Instagram, and 200,000 followers on Twitter. The likes, shares, and positive comments had social media buzzing in anticipation of this new product (McKee Foods, Inc., 2024).

Case Questions

1. When Little Debbie creates its message about the Christmas Tree Cake Ice Cream, what is an example of the encoding?
2. Because this promotion was largely dependent on public relations and publicity, what is the potential noise that may interfere with the media?
3. How did Little Debbie integrate its communication for the introduction of the Christmas Tree Cake Ice Cream?
4. What type of appeal is Little Debbie using for the launch of the Little Debbie Christmas Tree Cake Ice Cream?

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