

Creating a Snack Category in Produce



ROCHESTER, Minn. — Five years ago Craig Reichel began packaging lunch combination snacks with cheese, crackers and meat for chain retailers who wanted a private label. As an afterthought, he launched a similar line of baby carrot snacks with dip to utilize his packaging equipment more

packer,” Cummings explains. “We take produce and add value to it. We’re trying to create a category similar to what Lunchables® did in the meat department. We’re a small company. We’ll never be an Oscar-Meyer® but we’re trying to create that ‘Lunchables’ appeal in the produce department.”

“There is a lot of trial and error that goes into these products. We brought a good product into the marketplace but today it’s outstanding compared to where we started—and we were pretty excited five years ago.

Since the original launch, Reichel has expanded the Dippin’ Stix™ line to include cut-and-peeled carrots with either regular or fat-free dill or ranch dip, celery sticks with regular dill, ranch or fat-free ranch dip, and “Ants on a Log,” a creative combination of celery sticks, peanut butter and Dole® raisins. Perhaps Reichel’s crowning achievement in terms of shelf life, however, is “Fresh Apples n’ Caramel” and “Fresh Apples n’ Caramel with Peanuts,” featuring Granny Smith apples.

“We thought we had found our niche all but by accident, just looking for alternative uses for our equipment. What I found is that there have been a few others in front of us that either didn’t get the distribution or the shelf life or both. The quality of some previous products had kind of soured a few of the produce people. They initially said, ‘Well, we’ve tried things like that and they’ve spoiled.’ So we’ve had some pretty tough roads to go down to convince the buyers that this is a good product.”

Solid product performance, however, has turned the tide. Reichel says his company ships Dippin’ Stix from coast to coast and into Canada, getting excellent feedback from buyers and consumers alike.



Reichel says he is expanding his line of fresh-cut produce items.

fully. Surprisingly, produce items now make up more than half his business.

“We’re kind of the quiet company that nobody knows about,” reports the president of Reichel Foods, LLC. “People tend to wait around to see if you’re going to make it but we’ve definitely stood the test of time.”

Time and market penetration show that Reichel has indeed succeeded in establishing a viable line of produce SKUs. His sales manager, Bob Cummings, says the company is now distributing items such as cut-and-peeled carrots and even fresh sliced apples with caramel to major retailers such as Ahold, Wal-Mart, Albertsons, Kroger, Food Lion, Meijer and Walgreens with excellent results.

“We’re not a grower. We’re not a

Expanding Product Line

Recent additions to the company’s product line include carrots with bleu cheese dressing, apples with fruit dip and apples with both fruit dip and caramel dip in a 26-ounce party platter size. In addition, since the company now does some foodservice accounts “almost by accident,” Reichel is now offering multiple bag sizes of sliced apples for restaurant and institutional applications.

“We were able to get very good shelf life for our products, better, perhaps, than what the industry was used to at first,” Reichel explains about the evolution of his product line.



Reichel’s facility is USDA inspected and he says customers often remark about the cleanliness his staff maintains.