

FINDING THE RIGHT TASTE AND AROMA

FULL PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT CYCLE LEADS TO PROTOTYPE THAT MAINTAINS THE BRAND

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

PROJECT ESSENTIALS

Principal Investigator:
Robert McCurdy,
Candace Rambert

Years Active: 2017

School: CHCA

Support from:
OCE

Industry Partners:
AWARE Beverages

The most successful brands are memorable. They impact our senses and can remind us of a feeling years later. For AWARE Beverages and their SoCIAL LITE Vodka brand this is pivotal. The taste and aroma has to be right. Using all natural flavours is very important. And it has to be "light," with a specific calorie count. SoCIAL LITE had a goal to introduce three new flavours to its line up and approached the Food Innovation and Research Studio (FIRSt) at George Brown College with a list of ideas.

The team at FIRSt worked through a full product development process. Neetu Godara, from AWARE Beverages, welcomed the enthusiasm from the FIRSt team during the flavor development and was happy with how collaborative the project was. "The team at FIRSt has a lot of food science experience and educated our team along the way. We have a richer understanding of product development now in general because of this great experience. We had a number of goals with this project and FIRSt felt like an extension of our team when we got into the details of the work."

Robert McCurdy, Senior Food Scientist at FIRSt, explains that this included "the coordination of many different activities germane to the product development process, which covers everything from concept development to plant manufacturing and shelf-life monitoring." Of particular importance to this project was market research, consumer testing and product optimization. "More than 100 different

flavours were evaluated on the path to approved prototypes, which were more cost effective and were easier to manufacture versus the current products."

As a small company, AWARE Beverages believes developing new flavours is critical for the success of their brand. FIRSt's

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NEETU GODARA, AWARE BEVERAGES

expertise in food science, trained culinary palates and marketing made this possible with the tight deadlines they had. Candace Rambert, Culinary Technologist, adds "With the changes we made to the formulations, the client can now explore alternative thermal processes, which would be more cost effective and extend shelf life in the long term. Collecting consumer feedback with quantitative sensory panels was significant to get insight into the success of flavours we created. Now SoCIAL LITE has more to offer their consumers and can continue building their brand."

Robert says, "Flavouring products within the 80 calorie per can requirement was a very challenging obstacle. The results of the sensory testing indicated superior product quality and very favourable purchase intent scores."

Neetu reflects, "With the consumer testing we didn't know what to expect. We thought we knew what combinations would be popular, but one novel flavour created by a food scientist made it to the final three of consumer testing and surprised everyone when it came out on top as the winner! What's key at FIRSt is their experience and resourcefulness.

Now SoCIAL LITE has some new flavours that will enhance their brand and impact their consumers' senses, and potentially memories, for years to come.