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Innovation leads to growth for Elzea Snacks



Ooh, I love Crazies

East London based snack manufacturer, Elzea Snacks, has through constant innovation in its product offerings and a commitment to using only the highest quality of maize, oil and flavourings available, become a major player in two provinces.

In 1975, Elzea Snacks started out producing a maize drink called amaRhewu and later a range of vinegar and drinks. Now, 40 years on, the company exclusively manufactures maize snacks (chips). It boasts a substantial

range of products in multiple flavours and produces about 40 million packets of maize snacks per month.

The company was originally known as East London Zea Products, after the botanical name for maize, “zea mays”. This was shortened to Elzea. In 2009, husband and wife team Tyron and Melinda Power bought the company which at the time was only producing maize snacks and they have since expanded the business into the Western Cape.

Based in Ajax Road, Cambridge, Elzea Snacks today employs more than 600 staff and now has a significant footprint in both the Eastern and Western Cape.

Melinda Power says: “Besides using only the highest grade maize, we seek out the best flavours for our snacks. There are cheaper flavours available that are often simply a high concentration of salt and colour, however, we seek out complex and sophisticated flavours that are challenging to develop. These flavours keep our customers satisfied and coming back for more.

“The process never stops. We are continuously investigating new market trends and keep in close contact with our consumers over what they find new, interesting and appealing. We are always updating our product range and entertain our consumers with fresh flavours, fun new pack designs, exciting competitions and a variety of different product shapes and sizes.

“Our commitment to manufacturing a low cost and affordable snack for all never changes.”

While some well-known maize brands sell for R2.00 to R3.00 for a small 20g packet and R10 for a large 150g packet, Elzea Snacks offers a value-for-money snack for as little as 50c to R1.00 for small packets and R5.00 to R6.00 for larger packs.

“We keep costs down by managing our supply chain ourselves, keeping overheads low and we have nimble profit expectations. It matters to us that our snacks are affordable to all and people find value in what we offer. Families in all income brackets are feeling the pinch nowadays, having to cut down on luxuries and treats, and they are looking for an alternative, value-for-money snacks,” Power says.

Four years ago Elzea introduced its snacks to

the Western Cape and since then the company has grown to now rank among the top snack manufacturers in that region.

Besides using premium palm fruit oil imported from Malaysia and Indonesia that most snack companies use, all the other ingredients in Elzea's products are sourced locally. The factory is Halaal certified and inspected annually.

Elzea Snacks supplies certain franchised retailers such as Kwikspars and Spar supermarkets directly as well as larger wholesalers, who then in turn supply smaller retailers and hawkers. Elzea's well-known brands, such as Mama's puffed corn, Twisters Mexican-style corn snacks, Wiki Naks, Chippa Naks, Crazy's Naks, Cheese Pops, Caramel Blasts, Flyers and Sponge Pops, can all be found at selected supermarkets, corner shops, spaza shops and school tuck shops.

Elzea supplies Shoprite stores in the Eastern Cape region; but not yet in the Western Cape.

It also produces bulk, long tubular bags of its naks. These bags are referred to by the market as "maloppies" and are often bought by hawkers, who then subdivide them into small "bompie" bags to sell in rural communities.

The company carries no surplus stock or large volumes of stock. Every single order is freshly made within a period of 24 hours from receiving the order and then dispatched to stores within a lead time of 24 hours and for customers in remote regions, one week.

Elzea's slogan is "Share the fun, Share the flava!" and this mantra is carried through to its fun, innovative chip packet designs.

Many of Elzea's snacks have humorous cartoon characters on the packets which personalise the products and appeal directly to specific consumers. This sets Elzea apart from its competitors. Each brand has a specific identity that makes it more memorable, building a relationship with consumers.

For example, Sponge Pops are in the shape of noughts and crosses and the message on the back of the packet reads: "Hallo dudes – how cool is this?! A spongy pop in the yummiest of flavours that just melts away on your tongue! But the best part is, it's a fun toy too! You can

roll it, you can stack it, slide it over your finger, play tic-tac-toe, or make funny faces!” If Sponge Pops taste good AND you can play with them, there is a double reason to buy them again at the school tuck shop.

Power, an experienced marketer, says that following her products’ journey from the factory to the end consumer and listening to consumers’ taste preferences have been vital in developing successful product lines. “Consumers are price sensitive but also quality conscious. It’s a challenge to meet their demand. And it changes all the time. Just because something is popular today, does not mean it will be tomorrow. One has to understand food trends and move fast.”

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