
NICHE MARKETS OF COCONUT PRODUCTS IN THE UK

By Hafsah Hashim

Traditionally for Britons, the first choice cooler on a hot summer's day is an ice-cream, what better way than coconut-flavoured ice-cream and conjuring up images of swaying palm trees and sandy beaches as one slurps them. Do not be surprised though if majority of the British have not actually seen how a coconut looks like. The Bounty Chocolate advertisement showed a man under the coconut tree and a cracked open coconut that falls from the tree. So, when a friend of mine saw a green coconut for the first time, he was ecstatic! 'You mean this is REALLY how a coconut looks like? I thought it was brown and supposed to crack up like in the advertisement and immediately showed the coconut meat'..... and I add, 'Hey presto, here comes the Bounty Chocolate -The Taste of Paradise!' That is the result of the impression one gets from the advertisement. Hence, for the first time, he was introduced to the exotic taste of the coconut drink and did he regret not having tasted it before.

Then again, there is a revolution in the retail world which cannot fail to attract shoppers' noses. In the latest marketing ploy, to woo customers to the tourists holiday shops to make holiday reservations for the summer, many travel shops resorted to the aroma of coconut oil to evoke exotic holidays (did you know that?). Dr. George Dodd, Director of the Institute of Olfactory Research at Warwick University's Science Park and Scientific Adviser to Marketing Aromatics, which imported the concept to Britain, believes that smell can affect people's moods and emotions. A study by the Smell and Taste Research Foundation in Chicago suggests that aromas can enhance a product value. And, indeed it has, for the latest sales gimmick by shops to woo customers were met with astounding success! Sales for summer holidays to tropical destinations doubled even tripled...

all due to the lure of the aroma of coconuts! In fact, for Body Shop, the heady mixture of coconut butter and many other exotic potions dreamed up provided just the right cocktail over the Christmas festive season.

These are but some of the experiences I encountered during my stay in the U.K. My shopping trips to the supermarkets like Sainsbury, Tesco, Kwik Save, Marks and Spencers (also referred as St. Michael), Iceland, as well as pharmaceutical/cosmetic shops like Boots and Body Shop, not to mention the oriental supermarkets like Wing Yip and Jasons Chinese Supermarket were even more interesting. I was pleasantly surprised to be met with a lot of non-traditional coconut food products and coconut-based pharmaceutical/cosmetic items.

At Sainsbury, Tesco, Marks and Spencers or Kwik Save, you will

find cereals and cornflakes with coconuts like the 'Sainsbury Crunch Oat Cereal with raisins, coconuts, honey and hazelnuts', Tropical Coconut Cornflakes' by Sunblest, St. Michael's Luxury Muesli not to mention the many varieties of coconut ice-cream, yoghurt, tarts, cakes, macaroons, biscuits (fresh and boxed) by famous companies like Marks and Spencers, McVities, Memory Lane, Country Garden and surprise, surprise bottled Coco Pina, the coconut and pineapple flavoured drink with Silver Spring Ltd.! By the way, have you tasted the Sainsbury coconut-flavoured instant chocolate drink? And, guess what? Slimmers can now have their cake without pangs of guilt for Tesco have launched a range of virtually fat-free cakes to join low-fat biscuits, chocolate, yoghurt and mousse on their shelves. Dutch Nutricia, which supplies the cakes

to Tesco have created four deliciously, tempting 98% fat-free cakes -lemon, madeira, sultana, chocolate and, yes, coconut! These cakes have been on sale in health-conscious America for some time and have again repeated the success here.

Sainsbury, Boots, Fruits of Nature, Body Shop and Marks and Spencer even had their own brands of various coconut-based pharmaceutical/cosmetic items like hair shampoo, hair conditioner, creme bath, shower cream and soap! It is really amazing to see all these innovative products in the U.K.

At the oriental supermarkets, coconut products from the Far East line up the shelves, especially that from Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. So, don't despair and think you will die of hunger if you are the kind of person that can only consume oriental food. You will be greeted with a number of varieties of coconut cream powder from various countries, coconut milk, tinned and tetrapack coconut drink, tinned coconut meat with other fruits like jack-fruit, rambutans, etc. sago pearl drops with coconut milk, desiccated coconut, coconut oil, etc.

What really strikes me during these shopping trips were the colourful, excellent packaging of the products. The brilliant colours on the packages are very eye-catching and one certainly cannot miss them on the supermarket shelves. Some of these products are packaged by Whitworths- The Nut Store, KTC (Edibles) Ltd. not to mention the very brands by Sainsburys, Tesco, Sunblest, Marks and Spencers, Boots, Body Shop, etc. The prices of these products are very reasonable too and certainly are affordable by all levels of in-

come earners. And did you know too that the coconut could prove to be one of the industrial diamond's best friends? Researchers in Germany have developed a novel way to cut diamond-coat tools and components based on hydrogasification of charcoal and that the best results have been obtained with charcoal from coconut shells? Unlike conventional hydro-gasification processes, the method developed at the Fraunhofer-Institute for Surface Engineering and Thin Films uses closed circuit, preventing the escape of gas. Hence, the process is kinder to the environment.

All these are evidences of the fact that there are actually many other diversified non-traditional coconut products found in many parts of the world. Whether the diversification of coconut utilization is for food or industrial applications, it will certainly create a de-

mand and will be a substantial contribution to the economy of any country. Since demand is already created by the availability of these products on the supermarket and pharmaceutical/cosmetic shelves, the important concern for the APCC member countries is to sustain supplies to importing countries. Indeed, coconut in Britain is here to stay. It needs concerted efforts by coconut producing countries to ensure there are enough supplies to sustain the demand that was created. Now, who says that the coconut industry is a 'sunset industry'?

There is light at the end of horizon and this is the guiding light that will steer the coconut industry into the next century!

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Photo by Hafsah Hashim