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Healthy Hydration

Manufacturers look to score with better-for-you kids drinks

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Will better-for-you-beverages for children and teens become a slam-dunk for mass retail expansion, starting with prominent c-store cold vault positioning? Or will it be a three-point-shot attempt?

That's the question Dr. Brenda Jones, an Ohio-based ophthalmologist and founder of Youthtopia Beverages—and many other marketers of better-for-you kids drinks—hopes yields a positive response.

Earlier this year, Jones and partners formed Youthtopia Beverages, and from it came its initial brand Alley Oop sports drink. With 40 calories per 16-ounce serving, 10 grams of sugar and vitamins and electrolytes, Jones tells *Convenience Store Products* that “youths and teens will now have beverage options that provide great taste and active functionality.”

With a conservative distribution plan, Alley Oop is currently available in Miami/Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties in South Florida. Once trial results are in, the company plans to expand distribution throughout the Southeast.



The healthy beverage movement for kids is not isolated to Youthtopia, as other product rollouts attest. Vita Coco Kids is a new line of coconut water beverages made especially for children ages 2 through 8. Three new flavors—Apple Island, Paradise Punch and Very Cherry Beach—contain natural, nutrient-dense and electrolyte-filled coconut water, filtered water, natural fruit flavors and vitamin C.

With 35 calories and 8 grams of sugar per 6-ounce unit, Vita Coco Kids features fewer calories and approximately half the sugar of most other children's beverages, and no artificial sweeteners, according to the company.

While the big companies are certainly taking action, the better-for-you kids beverage trend seems to be one taken up by small, up-and-coming firms such as Youthtopia that have a vision that can be executed more quickly than major bottlers.

Pinpointing the product recipe was painstaking, says Jones. “To formulate Alley Oop with no sugar was not on the table because we know everyone has a sweet tooth,” she says. “Our product combines cane sugar, stevia and Splenda to achieve a sweetness that's appealing to the palate, but maintains low sugar, low carbs and is gluten-free.” To add credibility to the brand, Youthtopia is teaming with the Diabetes Research Institute Foundation.

Obtaining valuable cold vault space will be a development to watch as better-for-you kids offerings attempt to score across mainstream channels, including c-stores.

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