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RED, WHITE, AND BLUE

By Richard Turcsik

It's three cheers for the red, white, and blue in the grocery aisles. As part of their efforts to heal the nation, manufacturers have rolled out scores of patriotic-themed grocery products designed to raise funds for the American Red Cross and other charities. Candy bars, trading cards, M&Ms, soda, greeting cards, gumballs, facial tissue, and even diapers proudly bear the flag or patriotic themes. In a true sign of Yankee ingenuity, most of the products were created on the spur of the moment, rushed into production, and on store shelves in a matter of weeks.

But while well-intentioned, manufacturers have met with some controversy. Some have had problems dealing with the Red Cross, while others find consumers think they are trying to capitalize on disaster.

"After Sept. 11, the response we saw from companies proactively seeking us out to do something was extremely overwhelming and unprecedented," says Casey Minix, senior associate of marketing relationships at the American Red Cross, Washington. "People want to help in times of disaster, and they want to do whatever they can. While a large company might be able to make a \$1 million donation, they realize their customers can't. Cause marketing is a results-oriented way for companies to allow their customers to get involved helping the Red Cross."

Donations are still rolling in from case sales and were expected to get a boost in March because it's National Red Cross Month. Expect even more patriotic-themed products to hit store shelves this summer. "This July Fourth will be a very special July

Fourth, and it wouldn't surprise me if we see some re-releasing of [Sept. 11] products or a small tweak on a promotion that has already been done around July Fourth or any other patriotic holiday. The minds of people are now very sensitive to those dates. It definitely presents a marketing opportunity for patriotic items," Minix says.

One of the most successful patriotic items has been M&Ms. The idea was spawned when company employees created special bags of red, white, and blue M&Ms for the rescue workers at Ground Zero and the Pentagon. Consumers heard about the M&Ms and flooded the company with requests of where they could buy them to show their pride and patriotism. "We got hundreds and hundreds of letters. It was unbelievable," says Marlene Machut, external affairs director for Hackensack, N.J.-based Masterfoods USA.

Masterfoods originally hoped to raise \$2 million—that amount is printed on the bags—but raised \$3.5 million. "That is quite a bit more than we anticipated, and was basically because retailers were so receptive to the idea and came on board quickly," Machut says, adding that the company was able to produce 5 million packages in the record time of 30 days.

The M&Ms have already been sold

through, but they might be back for July Fourth. "That idea is being bounced around. We are still getting a lot of requests from consumers who couldn't find it



Packaged goods including tissues, soft drinks, and trading cards have taken on a patriotic theme since Sept. 11, with the goal of raising funds for the American Red Cross and other charities.

Patriotic-themed groceries are helping manufacturers raise millions for charities that assist victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

in their area, so we are thinking about how we can keep this idea alive," she says.

Also in the candy aisle, shoppers will find