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EatSmart Grows Fitness Scale Market Niche

By Mike Duff, Senior Editor

NEW YORK— The scale segment is changing, affording opportunities for producers such as EatSmart Products to serve both specific niches and the broader mass market as their business develops.

EatSmart is among those scale vendors developing functions that ensure their products perform to more demanding consumer requirements. Suppliers and retailers both are confronted with a shift to Internet scale sales as consumers go online to evaluate not only product characteristics but also performance reviews from users who have similar needs and preferences, a process that can help shoppers arrive at more stringent standards while simultaneously providing a degree of confidence that makes purchasing online a more comfortable move.

Although the company began operating in 2005 with a kitchen scale introduction, EatSmart has expanded its product portfolio to include a bathroom line. Just this year, it added a luggage scale. Established by a pharmacist and his son, the company has focused on serving consumers who are most concerned with abundance and accuracy of information. The concentration is not surprising, as the pharmacist changed careers after he became concerned about the growing instance of obesity-related disease among his customers.

That doesn't mean Eat Smart products will not satisfy consumers with a less-pressing need. The company created its initial product, The Nutrition Scale, for diabetics and others with serious weight issues who need to closely regulate nutritional intake.

William Geronimo, EatSmart vp, noted that it was a success particularly in the diabetic community where the ability to monitor not only calories but also nutrients such as carbohydrates is critical. Users reference The Nutrition Scale food database and weigh the portion they want to eat. The scale then determines not only the weight but also the nutritional composition based on 12 elements including calorie, carbohydrate, protein, sodium, fat and Vitamin K content.

While The Nutrition Scale, or the Nutrition Pro Scale as it's called now, is popular with consumers who have to know a lot about the food they're eating, other consumers wanted a product that had the kind of precise measurement qualities EatSmart had put into its founding product, but at a more moderate pricepoint. The company rolled out the Precision Pro Digital Kitchen Scale at a \$29.95 suggested retail price, providing more of a mass-market pricepoint in comparison with the \$74.95 Nutrition Pro.

In developing its business, EatSmart concluded that the Internet would be its foremost distribution channel. In evaluating distribution options, EatSmart realized that a smaller supplier has to struggle too much to win a place on a store shelf, Geronimo said. At the same time, they noticed that more scale sales were shifting to the Internet with both pure players and clicks and mortar operators expanding online. EatSmart has enjoyed success with both Amazon.com and Walmart.com, he added.

The movement of sales to the Internet has several drivers, among them the ability to better explain features online and even to provide links to sites that can support a fitness regimen. Geronimo noted that customer reviews has been critical to the success of EatSmart. Positive reviews certainly helped potential purchasers trust that the features EatSmart provides, including more precise measuring and better product aesthetics, are worth the purchase price.

"We've had great success online," he said. "We have hundreds of very positive testimonials from consumers on the products."

The Internet certainly offers the ability to get the word out among the general public, but it also is a conduit for special needs communities such as those that serve diabetics. Their members often search for products like the Nutrition Pro that can better serve a critical task. They also share information on those products that offer better functionality and are more willing than average to pay for superior performance.

Perhaps because it initially developed products that had to be appealing enough to

stand on kitchen countertops, EatSmart is concerned about aesthetics, having gathered feedback from shoppers turned off by clunky-looking scales. Another complaint touched on accuracy. Some scale manufacturers skimp on the sensing function and so deliver slightly varying weights whenever a consumer steps on the platform, Geronimo noted.

EatSmart looked at such factors and determined that it could develop a niche in what is an essentially mature market. An additional element played into its decision to enter the bathroom scale segment. EatSmart developed a scale with a larger capacity, better aesthetics

and features that were uncommon at the time of launch including a back-lit number display and step-on readings, which negated the typical requirement to reset the sensors by tapping the platform. The Precision Premium Digital Bathroom Scale, SRP \$34.95, that EatSmart introduced includes more features while the Precision Plus Digital Bathroom Scale, SRP \$39.95, has a greater capacity and a construction that allows particularly large consumers to use the product with confidence it will provide a stable, robust base.

"A lot of scales' maximum weight capped out at 300 or 330 pounds," Geronimo said. "We have increased the capacity of our scales to 400, 440 pounds to meet market demand."

One thing EatSmart determined it would not do was jump into the market with a body fat scale. Geronimo said that, among consumers who take fitness most seriously, doubt circulates about the accuracy of body fat scale measurement capabilities. When customer interest finally prompted the company to seriously explore the segment, he said EatSmart took its time developing an effective product, spending a year working the algorithm and technol-

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ogy. The company also invested in design to ensure its body fat scale, the \$59.95 Precision GetFit, offered the sophisticated styling EatSmart had applied to differentiate past products.

“There are no metal electrodes on the surface of the scale,” he said. “It’s all glass. Metal electrodes would have impacted the aesthetics and the product looks great without them. And it’s really accurate measuring body fat. We did market research comparing our technology to other body fat measurement methods and ours worked very well.”

The body fat scale was among the EatSmart introductions launched during the company’s inaugural participation in the International Home + Housewares Show. Its styling has prompted customers to refer to the product as a “Giant iPad,” according to Karen Welby, EatSmart marketing manager.

The company hopes that its formula works as it expands into still another scale segment. As it launched the body fat scale at the show, the company simultaneously introduced the Precision Voyager Digital Luggage Scale, SRP \$22.95, a portable mechanism that connects the sensing element to a strap so consumers can ensure their luggage doesn’t tip the weights toward additional charges no matter where they go.

As its product line proliferates, EatSmart is positioned to build on existing trends and focus on needs it can address in a manner that builds from its particular experiences, Geronimo indicated. Its experience online has helped it gauge demand and develop niche products and those that have a broader appeal.

“The landscape for the functions business is beginning to shift to higher capacities, with scales topping out at 500 pounds,” Geronimo

said. “People are willing to pay more for features, for a scale that is accurate, which has more advanced technology in analyzing the body.”

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