

Chocolate "sweetens" crisis effects

Written by Administrator

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Chocolate producer Heidi, part of Swiss group Confiseur Laderach is not influenced by the negative effects of the financial crisis and is continuing its investment plans this year. "People will always have reasons to buy chocolate" Erwin Vodenhoff, general manager of "Heidi Romania" stated for Bucharest Herald. Heidi next year will open a flagship store in Pantelimon (Ilfov county), where Heidi factory is also located. The company, which produces 1.5 million kilos of chocolate annually, is also investing this year in enlarging its warehouse capacity with 25 per cent. Heidi has just launched six types of white and black chocolate with fruits and is planning to launch more products by the end of the year and go through a re-branding process.

B.H: What is your perspective on the evolution of the chocolate market this year?

Erwin Vodenhoff: I do not think that the chocolate market will have a strong growth this year. It is true though that, compared to other markets, the chocolate market is less affected by the financial crisis, because people will always have a reason to buy chocolate. Last year this market registered a 20 per cent growth in terms of volume, while this year it may grow in volume between 5 and 8 per cent. But it is difficult to make predictions on the evolution of this market this year and also in 2010.

B.H: Are people buying cheaper types of chocolate right now in order to save money?

Erwin Vodenhoff: The first two months of 2009 showed that chocolate products, which do not have a clear brand profile or clear brand strategy, kept and keep losing more and more market share. There are two opposite chocolate types that should be considered: premium chocolate and cheap chocolate which can be bought for 2 or 2.5 RON a tablet. In Romania people are still buying a lot of this cheap chocolate. On the other hand, in other countries the private label segment, which comprises lower price products is between 20 and 30 per cent, while in Romania it is only 5 per cent. The reason why private label products have a low market share in Romania is that the local manufacturers compromise in terms quality, which allows them to sell the chocolate quite cheap.

B.H: Why is chocolate consumption so low in Romania compared to other countries?

Erwin Vodenhoff: Chocolate consumption volume has to do with the climate. People who live in the north eat more chocolate than those who live in the south, because chocolate starts melting above 20 degrees. In Spain and Italy people do not eat more than 3 to 4 kilos of chocolate per capita annually. In Romania people eat 1.9 kilos per capita annually. This is one of the lowest chocolate consumption levels in Europe. Only Bulgarians and Moldovans eat less chocolate. The second reason for which the consumption level is so low in Romania has to do with the income. Chocolate is not a primary good and people with low incomes have to buy food first and then chocolate. The third reason is that during the communist regime no chocolate history was created. Romanians spend more money on alcohol and cigarettes than on chocolate. I think it also has to do with the quality of the chocolate. One needs high quality chocolate to enjoy a self indulging moment. And the moment is not so good, if one does not have enough money to buy a high quality product. People in the Balkans and in eastern Europe

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eat more biscuits, than chocolate. There is also a competition between chocolate offered as a gift and wine and flowers which can also be offered as gifts. There are a lot of countries where chocolate is a typical gift, but not Romania, probably also because the pralines which are usually suitable for a gift are expensive.

B.H: *What type of chocolate do Romanians like?*

Erwin Vodenhoff : Our portfolio includes 80 per cent milk chocolate, 10 per cent white and 10 per cent dark chocolate. Creamy tablets have a quite high share, around 25 per cent of the sales are always tablets with filling. This consumption habit is typical for the inhabitants of the south- eastern European countries. In Poland and in Russia for instance people buy more black chocolate because they like to feel the strong cocoa taste. The chocolate bars segment is also gaining market share, because these bars are easy to find and can be bought from everywhere: from the car fuel station, from the cashier in a supermarket. The pralines have the lowest market share, only 15 per cent, because they are the most expensive of all the chocolate products.

B.H: *What kind of investments will Heidi make this year in Romania?*

Erwin Vodenhoff: This year we will invest in marketing, because we want to strengthen our image in Romania and abroad and we will focus on in-store promotion. In August we will start building our own store here, in Pantelimon, in front of the factory. It will be a flag- ship store and will open in February 2010. We also invested in the machines' upgrading to increase the production efficiency and to enlarge the capacity of our warehouse with about 25 per cent.

B.H: *Will "Heidi" launch new products next year?*

Erwin Vodenhoff: We will launch many products this year. We have just launched 6 new white and black chocolate tablets with strawberries, bananas, lemon, cherries.

Ciocolata "indulceste" efectele crizei

Producatorul de ciocolata Heidi, parte a grupului elvetian Confiseur Laderach nu resimte efectele negative ale crizei financiare si isi continua planurile de investitii. "Oamenii vor avea intotdeauna motive sa cumpere ciocolata" a declarat Erwin Vodenhoff, manager general "Heidi Romania", pentru Bucharest Herald. Heidi va deschide anul viitor un magazin in Pantelimon (judetul Ilfov), unde este localizata si fabrica Heidi. Compania care produce 1,5 milioane kilograme de ciocolata in fiecare an, va investi anul acesta si in extinderea capacitatii depozitului cu 25 la suta. Heidi tocmai a lansat sase tipuri de ciocolata abla si neagra cu fructe si intentioneaza sa lanseze mai multe produse pana la finalul anului si sa parcurga un proces de re-branding.

B.H: *Care este perspectiva dumneavoastra asupra evolutiei pietei ciocolatei anul acesta?*

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Erwin Vodenhoff: Nu cred ca piata ciocolatei va avea o crestere puternica anul acesta. Este adevarat totusi ca piata ciocolatei este mai putin afectata de criza financiara, pentru ca oamenii vor avea intotdeauna un motiv sa cumpere ciocolata. Anul trecut aceasta piata a inregistrat o crestere a volumului de 20 la suta, in timp ce anul acesta poate creste intre 5 si 8 la suta. Dar este dificil sa facem predictii asupra evolutiei acestei pietei anul acesta si in 2010.

B.H: *Oamenii cumpara ciocolata mai ieftina in acest moment, pentru a economisi bani?*

Erwin Vodenhoff: Primele doua luni ale lui 2009 au aratat ca produsele din ciocolata care nu au un profil clar sau o strategie au continuat si continua sa piarda si mai multa cota de piata. Exista doua tipuri opuse de ciocolata care trebuie luate in considerare: ciocolata premium si ciocolata ieftina care costa 2 sau 2.5 RON o tableta. In Romania oamenii cumpara inca multa ciocolata ieftina. Pe de alta parte in alte tari, segmentul de eticheta privata, care include produse mai ieftine este intre 20 si 30 la suta, in timp ce in Romania este numai de 5 la suta. Motivul pentru care produsele cu eticheta privata au o cota de piata redusa in Romania este ca producatorii locali fac compromisuri in ceea ce priveste calitatea, ceea ce le permite sa vanda ciocolata destul de ieftin.

B.H: *De ce este consumul de ciocolata atat de redus in Romania comparativ cu alte tari?*

Erwin Vodenhoff: Volumul consumului de ciocolata este legat de clima. Oamenii care locuiesc in nord mananca mai multa ciocolata decat cei care locuiesc in sud pentru ca ciocolata incepe sa se topeasca daca temperaturile depasesc 20 de grade. In Spania si in Italia oamenii nu mananca mai mult de 3- 4 kilograme de ciocolata pe an per capita. In Romania oamenii mananca 1,9 kilograme per capita anual. Acesta este unul dintre cele mai scazute niveluri de consum din Europa. Numai bulgarii si moldovenii mananca mai putina ciocolata. Al doilea motiv pentru care nivelul consumului este atat de scazut in Romania este venitul. Ciocolata nu este un bun primar, iar oamenii cu venituri mici trebuie sa cumpere intai mancare si apoi ciocolata. Al treilea motiv este faptul ca in timpul regimului comunist nu a fost creata o istorie a ciocolatei. Romanii cheltuie mai multi bani pe alcool si pe tigari decat pe ciocolata. Cred ca are legatura si cu calitatea ciocolatei. Oamenii au nevoie de ciocolata de calitate pentru a se bucura de un moment de placere. Iar placerea nu este atat de mare, daca oamenii nu au suficienti bani sa cumpere un produs de calitate superioara. Balcanicii si est-europeenii mananca mai multi biscuiti decat ciocolata. Exista si o competitie intre ciocolata oferita in dar pe de-o parte si florile si vinul, pe de alta parte, care pot fi oferite si ele in dar. Sunt multe tari in care ciocolata este un dar tipic, dar acest lucru nu se intampla in Romania, probabil si din cauza faptului ca pralinele, care sunt potrivite pentru a fi oferite in dar, sunt scumpe.

B.H: *Ce fel de ciocolata prefera romanii ?*

Erwin Vodenhoff : Portofoliul nostru include 80 la suta ciocolata cu lapte, 10 la suta ciocolata alba si 10 la suta ciocolata neagra. Tabletele cu crema au o cota destul de mare, in jur de 25 la suta din vanzari sunt reprezentate de tabletele cu umplutura. Acest tip de consum este tipic pentru tarile din Sud- Estul Europei. In Polonia si in Rusia spre exemplu oamenii cumpara mai mult ciocolata neagra pentru ca le place gustul puternic de cacao. Si segmentul de batoane de ciocolata castiga cota de piata, pentru ca aceste batoane sunt usor de gasit si pot fi cumparate

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de oriunde: de la benzinarie, de la caseria unui supermarket. Pralinele au cea mai scazuta cota de piata, de numai 15 procente, pentru ca sunt cele mai scumpe dintre produsele de ciocolata.

B.H: *Ce fel de investitii va face Heidi anul acesta in Romania?*

Erwin Vodenhoff: Anul acesta vom investi in marketing, pentru ca vrem sa ne consolidam imaginea in Romania si in strainatate si ne vom concentra pe promovarea in magazin. In august vom incepe constructia propriului magazin aici, in Pantelimon, in fata fabricii. Va fi un magazin flag- ship si se va deschide in februarie 2010. Am investit si in imbunatatirea echipamentelor pentru a creste eficienta productiei si pentru a extinde capacitatea depozitului nostru cu 25 la suta.

B.H: *Veti lansa noi produse "Heidi" anul acesta?*

Erwin Vodenhoff: Vom lansa multe produse anul acesta. Tocmai am lansat sase tipuri de tablete de ciocolata alba si neagra cu capsuni, banane, lamaie, cirese.