

Curry In a Hurry

By Shivani Vora

Ashok Vasudevan should have been happy. Boxes of Tasty Bite, his company's brand of ready-to-eat Indian meals, were flying out of specialty stores such as Wild Oats and Trader Joe's, with sales growing 22% in 2000 even after five years in business. But Vasudevan had a bigger dream. He wanted to make Indian food as familiar as frozen pizza, and to do that, he needed a spot in the aisles of the all-American supermarket.

"It was a serious struggle to get the big grocery stores to talk to us," says Vasudevan, 50, a native of Bangalore, India, who now lives in Stamford, Conn.



Ashok Vasudevan, CEO of Tasty Bite Preferred Brands International, at a warehouse in Linden, New Jersey.

"They negatively associated Indian food with spicy curry." To prove them wrong, Vasudevan increased store demonstrations of dishes like Bengal lentils tenfold, to 1,000 a year. He wanted to show the big grocers that American consumers, given a taste of his hearty but gently spiced meals, would make room on their shelves for Indian food right alongside boxes of macaroni and cheese. Armed with three years of data, Vasudevan approached Safeway buyers in 2003 and showed them the results: 40% of customers who tried Tasty Bite in a demo bought a box or two on the spot, compared with the industry average of 10%. Safeway agreed to stock

the products in 650 of its 1,776 stores, and its competitors soon followed. More than 50 chains, including Costco and Stop & Shop, now carry Tasty Bite, and sales passed \$15 million in 2006, up 40% from the year before.

The brand was launched just when America's palate was ready. In the late 1990s natural foods were taking off, and Americans were looking for more convenience even from ethnic foods. Tasty Bite fit both niches: all the meals are vegetarian and preservative-free (a vacuum-sealed pouch gives them a shelf life of 18 months), and they are ready to eat after a quick dunk in boiling water or a minute in the microwave. "Their pouches are less cumbersome and more consumer friendly" than canned or frozen meals, says Marco Galante, a food-industry analyst at J.H. Chapman Group in Chicago. The recipes are based on Indian home cooking, but Vasudevan invented new names to make them more familiar to Americans – aloo chole became Bombay potatoes, and palak paneer was renamed Kashmir spinach.

Tasty Bite isn't alone in bringing Indian food into the U.S. heartland – 291 new Indian-food products were launched last year, up 75% from 2005. Amy's Kitchen, the largest vegetarian-food company in the U.S., introduced Indian meals in 2002, and they are now the fastest-growing part of its business. Patak's, a firm based in Manchester, England, that is best known for its spicy pickles, began selling in Wal-Mart last year, and Whole Foods now carries more than 20 brands of Indian food, up from just a handful five years ago. But Tasty Bite has succeeded by making Indian convenience food its mission.

That idea didn't go very far in India. Tasty Bite's founders, a father-and-son team in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), wanted to

bring American-style convenience to Indian home cooks but struggled to find a market. Vasudevan discovered the company while he was working in India as an executive for Pepsico. He couldn't persuade Pepsi to take a chance on bringing Tasty Bite to the U.S., so he and his wife Meera eventually bought the company and did it themselves. Tasty Bite still makes and packs all its meals – 80,000 every day – at the original facility in Pune

in western India and grows its own vegetables on a 25-acre farm nearby.

Vasudevan added a research center to the Tasty Bite campus in 2002 to expand its line of Indian dishes (25 so far) and to experiment beyond the subcontinent. While Indian vegetarian meals will always be its mainstay, Vasudevan says, he had brought in a chef from Bangkok to add Thai food to the menu in 1999, and he has recently started offering Italian and Mexican. A made-in-India frozen pizza – what could be more American than that?

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Communication publicitaire

On suppose que M. Vasudevan a décidé de faire commercialiser ses produits en France. A partir des informations contenues dans l'article, rédigez pour son entreprise les deux documents suivants :

- un document commercial destiné aux responsables d'achat de la grande ou moyenne distribution française : il s'agit de présenter l'entreprise et ses produits, et de leur obtenir une place sur les linéaires
- un dépliant publicitaire visant les consommateurs français, distribué dans les boîtes aux lettres et/ou sur le lieu de vente, au moment du lancement de la gamme.