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Jer's Chocolates Stays True To Its Focus On Flavor And Fun!

Jerry Swain, founder and CEO of **Jer's Handmade Chocolates** shares his company's passion for all-natural peanut butter and chocolate products, and expansion.

CM: Besides the great story of how you got started, what makes your products and company unique?

JS: Jer's Chocolates makes all-natural peanut butter chocolate products. The company started with a collection of Chocolate Peanut Butter Balls in gift boxes. We've been very blessed as the collection has won six International Confectioner's Awards and has grown to 11 varieties. 'Have a Ball' is our tagline! Within the last nine months, we've expanded our line to gourmet Peanut Butter Bars in four flavors and Chocolate Covered Peanut Brittle Bites, also in four flavors.

CM: Why did you choose all-natural peanut butter products?

JS: Even though it is one of my favorite foods [next to ice cream], I wanted to ensure we were not a 'me too' product. There

are many great chocolate companies in our industry; I'm a fan of many of them. However, our focus is pioneering the peanut butter chocolate category and being the very best in this segment of the market. We use the best U.S. grown peanuts and premium ingredients to develop the delicious flavor profiles. As I researched the industry, I realized that America's favorite chocolate flavor combination is chocolate and peanut butter. Every statistic I researched pointed to the country's love for peanut butter and chocolate. Seven of the top 10 candy bars sold have peanut butter or peanuts in them, and if you go to almost any retail establishment, the Reese's brand commands much shelf space with numerous products. Jer's is giving the customer an all-natural, gourmet option.

CM: How do you come up with your flavor combinations and new product?

JS: It hasn't been scientific, but we've assembled our own research and focus groups. It's a lot of fun learning what people like and

the participants have a ball with it while giving us valuable input. We use familiar flavors that are loved by most [caramel, toffee, etc.] and strive to create the perfect combinations that people will purchase over and over, not just once to try it out. We have only introduced products that have received superior marks from all of the groups. We strive to introduce winners to market!

CM: What are you seeing at the retail level, and with your customer base?



JS: We are fortunate to have a fanatical following of our products that continues to grow everyday. The re-buy rate on our product has been outstanding. The important thing is to get the flavors of Jer's products in people's mouths to try, then, we get them hooked! The number of email and phone testimonials that come in for our product is very humbling. Part of the mission of our business is to 'create happy experiences' and we believe we are accomplishing that.

CM: Will there be new products in the future?

JS: Absolutely. In fact, we have a pipeline of products that we plan to launch over the next 24 months. It is im-

portant for us to continually develop unique quality products and flavors. As long as our customers continue to enjoy and ask for them, we will continue developing new products.

CM: To what do you attribute your company's success?

JS: People! We have a wonderful team at Jer's who shares the passion of our vision and mission. We work very hard and have a lot of fun. We are grateful to have great customer and vendor relationships. We treat all of our relationships as collaboration. We are continuing to add on great broker and distributor networks that share the same passion for our product as we do and we give them all the support they need to be successful. Our product differentiation and flavor profile have had a big part of our growth as customers truly enjoy the experience of eating an all-natural product that tastes good enough to come back for time and again.

CM: You seem like you're having fun. Is this fun work?

JS: We are truly enjoying the journey! I am learning every day. I don't think any of us have ever worked harder, but there is no doubt it is fun creating a product that makes people happy and feel good!