



« CEO DARIN EZRA knows the power of branding.

CEO for Hire

When it came time to offer Power Brands' services to others hoping to navigate the complicated beverage realm, Ezra formed a beverage-company-for-hire division, Power Brands Consulting, LLC with COO Marty Molina, who brings with him the experience of more than a dozen years in food and beverage marketing with Nestlé USA and Pepsi. The division offers services that cover every aspect of launching and marketing a brand, from R&D

all the way through securing distribution for the brand. Some call on Power Brands for help with one or two areas and others contract the company to manage the entire process, depending on their specific needs.

"You can think of Power Brands as a CEO managing your company for a fee," Ezra explains. "Instead of paying a CEO \$300,000 a year plus bonuses,

VITAL STATS

POWER BRANDS

CEO: Darin Ezra

COO: Marty Molina

HEADQUARTERS: Beverly Hills, CA

EMPLOYEES: 10 full-time

GOALS: To have a product in every store in the country.

Full House

As a developer, marketer and brand shepherd, Power Brands is all in. By Jeff Cioletti

Any successful beverage company tends to play its cards close to its chest when it comes to the intricate details of its path to success. That's not the case for Power Brands. The company not only has kept plenty busy managing its own brands, but it now also offers its industry expertise to a host of others looking to enhance the market presence of an established brand or make their first foray into the beverage world.

CEO Darin Ezra first launched Power Brands several years ago to develop and manage two brands: Kabbalah Energy Drink, a companion product of Kabbalah Water in which the company had a small equity stake, and Go Girl Energy drink, which was an early entry into the burgeoning for-women-only energy sub-segment that Power Brands owned outright, but sold a few years ago to West Sacramento, CA-based Nor-Cal Beverage Co.

you pay Power Brands a fraction of that and we manage it as a CEO would manage your company."

Usually that relationship begins with little more than an idea. For instance, a company calls Power Brands with a concept for a water enhanced with functional ingredients. Let's say that company has a general notion of which ingredients it wants in the beverage, in addition to a basic concept for the label design.

"First of all, we try to define all of the ideas we have and [assess] how far they've gotten on all of the label's design, if at all," Ezra says. "[We'll ask] 'Do you know who your core demographic is, ie: are you marketing to men, women, kids?' They're usually pretty specific on that. Then, 'What sort of flavor profiles are you most interested in?' We get as much of a definition on the brand that they have as possible."

When it comes to formulation, Power Brands is usually



«KABBALAH ENERGY DRINK was one of the first brand launches Power Brands tackled.

pretty flexible with its potential clients. “Unless you have an absolutely unbelievable formula, we will work on a correct formula for you,” Ezra reveals. “People will put things like zinc in a beverage—terrible idea. Or they want 5,000 milligrams of B12. There are just certain ingredients that don’t taste good. We reformulate the product.”

As far as the label is concerned, the company can be as involved as the client needs it to be. It helps that Power Brands has an in-house graphic design department, which, in addition to labels, designs all print, outdoor and collateral advertising for the brand.

“We walk them very closely through every part of the process and try to get them to come to the manufacturing facility for the first production run and try to get them to know the vendor,” Ezra says. “We go to the R&D facility as the product’s being developed and sit with the technicians and make comments and give feedback—so it’s almost like they’re getting a degree in beverages. By the time they finish, they understand the process of running their business and who’s going to be supplying them with what in the supply chain.”

While that’s all going on, Power Brands’ marketing department is busy putting together a marketing plan for the client. Additionally, the company will formulate a business plan for those clients trying to raise capital for their brands. The clients will then review such plans and offer their feedback. “They might say, ‘No, you misunderstood. We’re not looking at that demographic, we’re leaning a little bit more

in that direction.’ So we tailor it to that. Or, ‘No, the executive summary doesn’t really feel like my vision, I was thinking more along these lines.’ We fix that for them,” he expounds. “Ninety-five percent of it, it’s us, but we take their input in areas where they’re uncomfortable.”

However, he’s quick to point out, the company does not cater to potential clients’ every whim if the Power Brands team feels that certain client notions are not in the best interest of the product. “We’ve turned down a lot of business, some pretty big contracts, because the client absolutely will not listen to us and they do not know what they’re doing at all,” he admits. “We also won’t take money from people if we don’t think they could afford it. That’s just an ethical decision. Even if their product’s good, we’ll advise them, we’ll take a fee to write a business plan for them and help them raise the capital so they don’t have to risk everything they have on a beverage concept.”

Once the product’s developed and manufactured and a marketing plan is in place, Power Brands manages its rollout. That includes hiring

key personnel to work for the client: brand managers, production managers, purchasing staff, promotional teams, sales managers, etc. “We will then, from a very top level, manage those people for them.”

Sometimes, depending on the terms of the individual contract, the company retains a stake in the brand.

A Winning Hand

Power Brands continues to maintain its own portfolio of brands, most recently launching Pro Player Endurance Formula. The functional beverage adds its own unique spin to the energy category: It’s designed not for snow boarders, dirt bike racers or other extreme sports enthusiasts normally courted by the segment, but for what is quite possibly the hottest game in the country: poker.

«POWER BRANDS is on the cutting-edge of drink formulation technologies with products like Reborn, which features active wheatgrass enzymes.





«POWER BRANDS is rolling out the Teazzazz RTD line.

“Poker is the fastest growing sport in America and, as far as I know, we’re the first actual brand catering directly to the poker industry,” Ezra notes.

It almost begs the question, why would a sport that involves a great deal of sitting at a table need an energy drink? The answer can be found on the brand’s website, drinkproplayer.com: “Pro Player Endurance Formula was scientifically developed to help poker players maintain focus, endurance and mental acuity. Play to Win.”

The brand plays up its ginkgo biloba content for its memory and thought-enhancement capabilities, as well as its green tea extract for its purported ability to increase blood flow throughout the body and stimulate mental clarity—all assets for the poker player.

Though the geometric style of its can imagery is curiously reminiscent of a certain bovine-monikered energy pioneer, there are two very distinct differences: large, diagonal pictures of playing cards and a trio of poker chips arranged beneath the Pro Player name.

The company even has secured the endorsement of 10-time World Series of Poker champ Phil Hellmuth.

“He has the most World Series of Poker wins in Texas Hold ‘Em in the world,” Ezra raves.

Hellmuth also owns a stake in the brand. Additionally, *Card Player* magazine, which, Ezra says, “is to poker players what *Beverage World* is to the beverage industry,” also owns a percentage of Pro Player.

This month Power Brands plans to launch a tea product called Teazzazz and a range of health drinks called Reborn. According to Ezra, the brands are evidence of the company’s work on developing cutting-edge functional drinks. “For example, Reborn contains organic wheatgrass and honey and we were able to develop a formulata that allows the finished product to include active wheatgrass enzymes. It was a real accomplishment,” he explains. “And we’re working on a number of other functional projects, including developing a line of drinks with George Murphy, one of the world’s leading molecular biologists.”

Staying in the Game

Having a hand in every stage of the beverage development and marketing process is not without its share of significant challenges.

“I’d have to say the biggest issue at the moment is human resources because it’s such a specialized industry,”

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[UPCLOSE]



« PRO PLAYER, according to Power Brands, is the first known beverage made specifically for poker players.

Ezra reveals. “We know what we do, we have the answers for all the questions. We’ve been there and done that 1,000 times. But it’s about being able to put the right people in the right seats.”

Of course, as any beverage developer can tell you, there are plenty of R&D issues as well.

“With some of the more sophisticated formulas it’s sometimes challenging to get a balance between what we’re trying to achieve with the nutritional or nutraceutical content,” Ezra explains.

And then there’s production, which opens a whole other can of worms. “It’s chal-

lenging to find the right manufacturing facility that can cater to your needs,” Ezra notes. “There’s a big shortage of manufacturing in certain areas. [For instance] getting a person who can fill aseptically in Oregon is tough. Because beverage manufacturing is so specialized it’s very challenging finding the right facility for the right product. There aren’t any facilities in America that can do even 10 percent of what there is in the spectrum of beverages. Some can hot fill, some can pasteurize, some are organic, some are plastic, some are glass, some are cans and so on. Very few are all of those.”

Compounding that is the fact that the contracts that many co-packers have with large brands often stipulate which types of companies the packers can and can’t do business. That could seriously limit a potential client’s packing prospects. “Or they’re running at complete capacity, which is probably 50 percent of all the facilities and just cannot take your business,” Ezra points out.

However, all of those challenges combined aren’t stopping Power Brands from pursuing its ultimate—and quite ambitious—goal.

“I would like to be able to say one day that you can find a Power Brands product in every single store that sells beverages in America, whether it’s something we developed for ourselves or for a client, or something we worked on,” Ezra ambitiously announces. “Until then, we won’t be finished.” **BW**