



Meghan Boyer

Discover More About Ethel's

Ethel's Chocolate Lounge is owned by Mars Retail Group, a business unit of the Mars Corporation, which owns Snickers, M&Ms and Twix in addition to other products. The Ethel's name comes from Ethel Mars, wife of Frank Mars. In 1911, the two started making and selling chocolates from their kitchen in Tacoma, Wash., a venture that eventually blossomed into Mars Inc.

The first chocolate lounge opened in Chicago, Ill., in spring 2005. There are currently 10 chocolate lounges in the Chicago region and 10 lounges in the Las Vegas, Nev., valley. The chocolate factory and company offices are located in Henderson, Nev.

Phil Levine, corporate communications director for Mars Retail Group, describes the two markets where Ethel's currently operates as places where people appreciate fine products and where they are willing to have a unique experience, which meshes well with Ethel's premium product lines.

Mars Retail Group is looking to expand the Ethel's brand nationally. There are new cities currently under consideration. Over the next year or two, Levine hopes that Ethel's will be in at least one or two new markets.



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Raising The (Chocolate) Bar

Ethel's Chocolate Lounge is working to change consumers' perception of gourmet chocolate from a special-occasion treat to an everyday indulgence.

There are many products that consumers don't deem necessities of life. Premium chocolates, like plants, tend to fall into this category. Certainly, everyone loves to get such products, but unless there's a special occasion or some disposable income on hand, there are some people who won't purchase those "unnecessary" products themselves or will substitute low-cost alternatives to satisfy their desires.

Ethel's Chocolate Lounge, part of Mars Corporation, is working to change consumers' perception of premium chocolate much like Starbucks did with coffee. Taking its cue from Starbucks, where people will pay a few dollars for a cup of coffee, the Ethel's locations serve chocolate, fondue and chocolate beverages with prices that range from roughly \$1.50 for a single piece of chocolate to \$15 for fondue that serves 1-2 people.

The Anytime Treat

Chocolate has been around since the ancient Maya and Aztec cultures started mixing ground cacao seeds with various seasonings to make a spicy drink. Today, people can find it everywhere, from mass-market candies in convenience stores to high-end sweets in fancy shops. The goal of Ethel's Chocolate Lounge is to cre-

ate an affordable luxury for consumers and take eating chocolate from just another sweet treat to a full-blown trendy experience that people can enjoy daily (again, just like what Starbucks did to coffee).

"The idea behind Ethel's and the Chocolate Lounge is that chocolate shouldn't just be for the chocolate holidays — Valentine's and Mother's Days. It should be an everyday enjoyment and people should consider it kind of an everyday indulgence," explained Phil Levine, corporate communications director for Mars Retail Group.

Taking gourmet chocolate off a pedestal and making it accessible to everyone is a key factor in the success of Ethel's Chocolate Lounge. "The term is approachable. It's approachable gourmet chocolate," said Levine. "If you're tired and you've had a long week, then it is a special occasion and you should treat yourself. People can't get away on vacations as much as they'd like these days. A lot of people's lives are more stressful and demanding and this is kind of one way to give yourself a little break without having to get on a plane to do it."

Creating An Experience

The lounge environment is a key factor in creating an experience for Ethel's customers, who are largely female. Levine describes the environment as conducive to lingering and



Left: The goal of Ethel's Chocolate Lounge is to create an affordable luxury for consumers and take eating chocolate from just another sweet treat to a full-blown trendy experience that people can enjoy daily. Right: With its many pinks and browns, the décor of Ethel's Chocolate Lounge is tailored toward its mostly female client base. (Photos: Ethel's Chocolate Lounge)



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immersing one's senses in chocolate. The lounge décor is decidedly feminine, with varying shades of pink and brown, and many perceive the lounges as places for "the girls" to gather and relax. In the Chicago, Ill., region, groups

can rent a lounge for a private party, and Levine points out that the types of gatherings range from engagement parties to menopause parties, which reflects the lounge's varied customer demographics.



Best In Chicago

AOL CityGuide, a network of local entertainment information on the Web for more than 300 cities nationwide, chose Ethel's Chocolate Lounge as the best chocolate in the Chicago region for 2007, only two years after lounges opened in the area.

"We're very proud of the fact that we went from the new kid on the block to the favorite chocolatier in the city within two years," said Phil Levine, corporate communications director for Mars Retail Group. To celebrate, Ethel's held a customer appreciation day for the Chicago region on May 17 and gave away up to 10,000 boxes of chocolate from all 10 Ethel's locations in the area.

AOL CityGuide editors select City's Best nominees, and consumer votes ultimately determine which venues are chosen the best in their respective categories. A search for chocolate in Chicago at <http://cityguide.aol.com> yields more than 150 results.

Mars Retail Group, the business unit of Mars Inc. that owns Ethel's, was not concerned about creating such female-oriented stores. "You recognize that a certain product is more skewed toward one demographic or another. As long as it's not exclusionary, I don't think there are any problems with going with what your strengths are, and I think that really what we do is play on our strengths and the appeal of the chocolate and the chocolate lounge," explained Levine. He also said many men visit Ethel's locations as well, both on their own or accompanied by females.

Educating The Public

With locations in the Chicago and Las Vegas, Nev., areas, Ethel's Chocolate Lounge is continually working to build its brand recognition year after year. "When you're introducing a brand, there's a certain level of advertising you have to have and a certain type of advertising because it's an introduction," said Levine.

He further explained that the advertising campaigns need to be continually tweaked to reflect what is currently happening with the brand and

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the market. For example, while Ethel's advertising is largely directed toward females, the advertising messages change around Valentine's Day, a day when more men are making chocolate purchases.

The Plan Is Working

Since it opened in Chicago in 2005, Ethel's has become the city's favorite chocolate according to

the 2007 AOL CityGuide's City's Best list (see sidebar, opposite). The recognition is a concrete affirmation that Ethel's is succeeding in convincing Chicagoans that gourmet chocolate can be an affordable, everyday luxury.

What are you doing to change the perception of plants in consumers' minds from springtime and special occasion purchases to everyday luxuries? 🌱

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Delivering Quality Chocolate

Ethel's Chocolate Lounge has a philosophy that revolves around decadence and treating oneself. The company Web site reads: "Here, among the truffles and the cocktails, the nuts and the caramels, the fruits and familiar favorites, you'll find one very rare and extraordinary ingredient common to every piece of Ethel's chocolate: 100 percent chocolate passion.

"You can see it in the exquisite finish, detect it in the heady aroma and taste it in every sumptuous and silky, warm-blended bite. We believe you will enjoy these premium chocolates as much as we enjoy making them for you. You love chocolate. We're here to help. Have a chocolate day."

To fulfill its philosophy and deliver high-quality, drool-worthy chocolate, Ethel's employs chef Jin Caldwell to create the gourmet chocolate confections. A former chocolatier and pastry chef for the Wynn Las Vegas and Bellagio hotel resorts, Caldwell is responsible for the unique and tasty collections at Ethel's, such as the current spring line that features elaborate floral designs on the actual chocolates. Her Valentine's Day line, called the Love Collection, had heart-shaped chocolates with hearts also on the chocolates themselves and the words "I love you" in six different languages.



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fig. 1

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fig. 2

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fig. 3

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