

Third Place

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Genesis of a Green Brand in the Mayan Rainforest

In December 2006, Christmas holidays were the last thing on the mind of Omar Roquet, a recent MBA graduate from IPADE Business School, with the first big brand development assignment of his young career. Roquet, together with his small team, had only three months to develop all brand concepts for the world's first biodegradable organic chewing gum, from his native Mexico.

The deadline was tight because the team needed to be ready to launch at the February 2007 organic food tradeshow in Germany (BIOFach).ⁱ As if time pressure were not enough, Roquet also felt tremendous anxiety to build the best possible brand because the livelihoods of almost 3,000 families were dependent on strong sales of the new product.

The organic gum was the first new product developed by the Consorcio Chiclero, a group of cooperatives representing gum harvesters (*chicleros*) of the Mayan rainforest in southeastern Mexico. The Consorcio empowered the *chicleros* to control more aspects of the harvest, production, and sales processes of the raw material gathered from the native chicozapote tree. This control was important to the *chicleros* and their families because increased margins had the potential to alleviate the poverty that plagued their lives. After ten years spent developing the gum formula, the *chicleros* were ready to launch the product, but had no experience or expertise in how to sell a consumer product.

Knowing that they had only three months before the show, the Consorcio contracted with the advertising agency where Roquet worked to help develop brand strategies. Roquet, as team leader, was tasked with building three brand names and package mock-ups and proposing a go-to-market plan for the *chicleros*.

The Chewing Gum Industry



The history of chewing gum dates back to prehistoric times, when men and women chewed on tree resin for enjoyment. Almost every culture, from the Greeks to the Mayans, chewed on a natural product for enjoyment and oral hygiene. Chewing gum, a sub-sector of the confectionery industry, which also included chocolate and sugar products, became a profitable success story in 1848, when the Curtis brothers sold chewing gum that was made from tree resin, paraffin, and added flavors. As the paraffin gums became more

ⁱ See <http://www.biofach.de/en/> for information on the world's largest organic food tradeshow.

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