

# THE SCOOP ON IZZY'S

**National acclaim compels a small ice cream café to find a label partner that meets small business needs**

BY ALLISTON ACKERMAN, NEWS EDITOR

Last year, the America's 100 Best issue of *Reader's Digest* shined a spotlight on a small ice cream manufacturer that was gaining popularity with the locals in St. Paul, Minnesota. "An ice cream shop that can't be licked," was how *Reader's Digest* described **Izzy's Ice Cream Café** — a local producer of super premium ice cream handmade from Minnesota cream.

Now, one year after the *Reader's Digest* article, Izzy's is managing the challenges that national acclaim brought to its small, now booming, business such as meeting a need for pint labels that will help its products to compete effectively on store shelves.

## THE BIRTH OF THE 'IZZY'

Stemming from a desire to be in business, husband and wife team Jeff Sommers and Lara Hammel opened the doors to the first Izzy's Ice Cream Café in July 2000. Izzy's sells 32 flavors of ice cream and sorbet, cycling through 130 flavors a year. But what makes Izzy's unique when compared to other ice cream shops is a gimmick that Sommers borrowed from industry-leader and competitor Dairy Queen.

"Here in Minnesota, Dairy Queen got trademark rights for the swirl that it puts on top of its cones," says Sommers. "I thought that this was kind of ridiculous, but none the less interesting."

Based on the Dairy Queen concept, and the idea that consumers love free samples, Sommers came up with a novel ice cream technique for his cones called the "Izzy": a smaller scoop perched atop the cone (pictured right). "Now we are trying to trademark the 'Izzy' and participating wholeheartedly in the ridiculousness that I observed from Dairy Queen," says Sommers.

## PARTNERS IN MIND

In addition to being singled out by *Reader's Digest*, Izzy's placed No. 1 in a blind vanilla taste test in the twin cities. Both honors ensure that Izzy's will experience continued growth. Rather than franchising, Sommers hopes to grow its business through managing partners.

"Our goal and most ideal scenario is to grow from the national attention that *Reader's Digest*

brought on...to be available in the national market but not be a national brand," says Sommers. "You can get Izzy's in New York or Chicago if the support is there through managing partners."

For example, Izzy's Guatemalan Coffee flavor is made in partnership with a Minneapolis company called **Peace Coffee**, which sells fair trade and organic coffee. A Maple Nut flavor is made with organic Wild Country maple syrup from Lutsen, Minnesota. "As we continue to develop our retail product offerings, we will be working to partner with additional local companies," says Sommers. "We currently have four new flavors in development."

## THE RETAIL SHELF

In an effort to build brand value through an increased customer base, Izzy's recently entered the pint market and offers ice cream to the grocery market. The company sells eight flavors to **Kowalski's**, which operates about 10 supermarkets throughout the state of Minnesota. Two out of the eight flavors in pints — Guatemalan Coffee and Maple Nut — call for labels that are co-branded in order to recognize both Izzy's and its partners.

## QUALITY INSIDE AND OUT

To compete effectively with local and national premium ice cream brands for shelf space, Izzy's needed a full-color label to slap on its pint containers. The company only needed a few hundred labels for its eight products, but its existing printer couldn't give Izzy's low volume opportunity for run. Sommers found Lowry Labeling, a division of **Lowry Computer Products** that offers digital printing for on-demand and high-quality color printing, when he bargained his way into a local trade show.

There, Lowry showed Sommers how digital printing can eliminate the tedious process of traditional printing, thus offering four main advantages to Izzy's:

▶ **Speed:** Digital printing eliminates the need for plates and practically eliminates set-up time.

▶ **Quality:** Higher resolution helps to define detail and produce more vibrant colors.




▲ Izzy's sells 32 flavors of ice cream and sorbet, cycling through 130 flavors a year.

▶ **Cost:** The elimination of plates, film and set-up time results in fixed costs that are substantially lower — an ideal situation for a small business like Izzy's.

▶ **Flexibility:** Digital printing has the ability to select complete variable data whether its names from a database, consecutive numbering multiple bar codes and several color versions of the same label.

Using its HP Indigo Digital Press, Lowry provided actual samples of labels after receiving artwork designed by Izzy's. With a few color and copy adjustments, Lowry and Izzy's went to finished labels.

"Lowry allowed me to consider that concept of putting our partners' stickers on the package because all I need to do is design a new product label," says Sommers. "Once you pay for the initial set-up, the new flavor can be run next to vanilla and you get the same label counts. Label counts aren't per product, they are per run," he explains.

Since then Izzy's product quality and that of its packaging has opened doors at several local supermarket chains. "We do not need to take the market by storm, but instead, we need to take the market by building our customer loyalty one person at a time," says Sommers. 

## GOING SOLAR

As a small business, **Izzy's Ice Cream Café** owners Jeff Sommers and Lara Hammel wanted to do their part to reduce harmful effects of energy use on the environment. In June 2004, Izzy's kicked off an innovative solar project designed to harness the sun's energy to produce and chill its ice cream. The project — dubbed High Noon Solar — calls for an eight-kilowatt solar system on top of the roof at Izzy's that will provide one-third of its peak electrical power demand. According to Sommers, Izzy's has raised more than \$20,000 in kind donations from its customers and is 90 percent complete both with construction and fund raising. For \$100 you can sponsor a solar panel and contribute to a healthy energy source for the St. Paul community. Please contact Jeff Sommers at (615) 603-6929, [jeff@izzysicecream.com](mailto:jeff@izzysicecream.com) for details.