

Mars Wrigley Teams Up with Bumble to Boost Consumer Connections on Valentine's Day

As the holiday evolves beyond romantic connections, the candy giant follows suit

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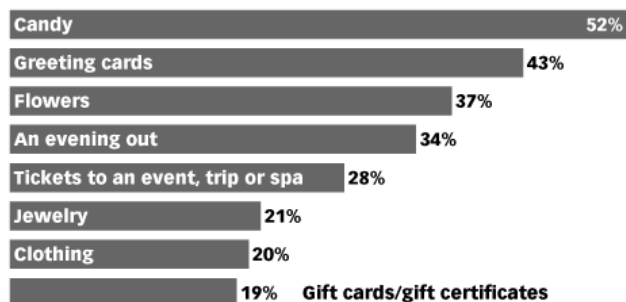
Rimma Kats

Consumers in the US are planning to spend roughly \$196 on Valentine's Day this year, an increase of 21% over 2019, according to research from the National Retail Federation (NRF).

Candy, unsurprisingly, will be a popular gift. More than half (52%) of US internet users said they plan to purchase sweets for Valentine's Day, ranking above flowers, an evening out or jewelry.

Types of Gifts US Internet Users Plan to Purchase for Valentine's Day, Jan 2020

% of respondents



Source: National Retail Federation (NRF), "2020 Valentine's Day Spending Survey" conducted by Prosper Insights & Analytics, Jan 30, 2020

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We recently sat down with Hank Izzo, vice president of marketing at Mars Wrigley US, who spoke about Sweet ReTREAT (the brand's Valentine's Day pop-up in New York City), why the company teamed up with dating app Bumble on this activation, and how its efforts continually evolve as the holiday shifts from romance to celebration.

This is the third year you're doing a pop-up around Valentine's Day. Tell me about this particular activation and what you're hoping to get out of it.

We want this to be an experience. We have some of the top brands for Valentine's Day, and when we first started the whole journey, it was much more about "treat yo'self." We know from an insight standpoint that people always want to treat themselves, but it's even better if they can do that with a friend. And so, the whole theme around the Sweet ReTREAT this year is about connection. People connect over our brands all the time, but especially around holidays. Valentine's Day is [roughly] a \$20 million holiday—it's big.

And this, hopefully, will be the fourth year in which our brands have grown and led the categories, so we're very excited.

There is a difference between the way Valentine's was celebrated several years back and where it is today; it used to be just a romantic holiday. It's changed dramatically to be very inclusive. People now celebrate Galentine's and Palentine's Day. And because of that, we

come up with new products that are a bit more inclusive and allow for casual or nonromantic gifting.

Why did you partner with Bumble this year?

Several months back, we started to think about a couple of key themes. The one that rose to the top was this whole concept of connection and the fact that Valentine's Day is becoming a great time to connect with not only a serious loved one, but also family and friends. So, that's probably where it started.

And then we thought, "Who's the expert?" We had not partnered with somebody in a space like this. What if we did partner with a company that was out there on digital? Bumble obviously came in at the top of the list. We then approached them, and we were both eager about working together.

How did you get the word out about this activation?

This year, we intentionally got people to sign up for the event ahead of time. Part of it was understanding how many people we're going to get through the space. It's a great space, but there is only so much room. So getting the word out early is important, and we used our social and digital platforms to do that.

Once consumers enter the space, how are you hoping they continue this conversation with you after the event?

There are a lot of very Instagram-able, shareable things around the pop-up. From a Valentine's standpoint, a lot of people are out there doing their last-minute shopping and planning. We love the last-minute shopper, but we also love the shoppers who plan ahead of time.

This is hopefully going to raise awareness around not just that last-minute romantic gift, but also the question of how you're going to spend Friday night. Are you going to be with your friends or your family? Is there somebody you forgot to buy a gift for? Or maybe you want to buy some Dove Promises to make cupcakes for a party at your house with friends.

What have you learned from your previous pop-ups?

People want to be connected to our brand. And in order to make that connection, we obviously have to do it socially and digitally—but we also want to elevate that connection with an experience.

Across all of our brands, we're constantly pushing the envelope on experiences. You must have great advertising. You need 360 activations. Things like this set you apart because, many times, you have only a small window of 15 to 30 seconds to communicate what your brand's about and what you stand for.

The thing we've learned the most—and probably the reason we're still doing it—is enhancing the experience and delivering that to our consumers in the ways they want, as evidenced by the success of this event.

Are you looking to host more of these experiences around other key holidays?

We may. The Sweet ReTREAT is the one that we probably spend the most time on, but we've been thinking about expanding.

Valentine's Day is evolving in a big way, and as it evolves, we need to evolve. It's important to leverage our brands in a world where over 94% of Americans want candy as a gift, and actually 50% of the gifts that are bought out there are accompanied by confections. That's a really important insight for us.

And again, Valentine's Day is so huge for us. It's a \$20 million opportunity and getting bigger. We do these events not only for our consumers who love the brands, but for those at the retail level who are expecting us to take it up a notch. Experiences actually help create a lot of awareness digitally and thus drive people to purchase in stores and elsewhere.