

Ayoba South African Biltong: An Organic Adoption of Third-Party Certifications.

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KEYWORDS

- Third-Party Certification
- Ayoba
- Product Innovation
- Inventive Packaging

THIRD-PARTY CERTIFICATION RESEARCH**An Organic Adoption of Third-Party Certifications: An Interview with Ayoba**Tobias P. Roberts ¹  | Karen E. E. Pendergrass ² ¹Department of Standards, Paleo Foundation, Encinitas, CA²Department of Standards, Paleo Foundation, New York, NY**Correspondence**Tobias Roberts
Department of Community Research,
Paleo Foundation, El Salvador**Contact**¹Email: karen@paleofoundation.com¹Twitter: @5WordsorlessKP²Email: tobias@paleofoundation.org**Abstract**

Ayoba is a family company based out of the Washington DC Metro area that has brought the South African tradition of Biltong to the United States. Through adding value and innovation to an established part of the food industry, investing in eye-catching and attractive packaging, and investing in third-party certification programs, Ayoba has positioned itself for economic success and long-term growth. Below, we analyze some of the foundational elements of success for the brand, and how their organically-evolved investment in third-party certifications has allowed the brand to conquer new markets.

KEYWORDS

Third-party certification, Ayoba, product innovation, inventive packaging.

1 | INTRODUCTION

As a melting pot of cultures, the United States has one of the most diverse cuisines around the world. Walking down the streets of virtually any city in the country will offer an endless array of options for both çAccording to Mordor Intelligence, the ethnic foods market is projected to witness a compound annual growth rate of 11.80 percent [\[i\]](#) during the forecast period of 2021 to 2026.

Despite the obvious interest in ethnic cuisine, introducing innovative food products that consumers do not have much experience with can be a challenge for food brands. Only about 15 percent of consumer packaged goods [\[ii\]](#) launched in the United States are still around two years later. Though there are a variety of reasons for product failure, a lack of consumer knowledge of a given product can quickly devastate a product launch.

According to recent studies, almost half of the population of the United States (about 125 million Americans[\[iii\]](#)) consumed meat snacks and beef jerky regularly. In dollars and cents, a recently published industry financial report[\[iv\]](#) finds that “revenue for the Meat Jerky Production industry has grown in each of the past five years, including a 3.0% increase in 2018. The industry's small-scale nature, relatively low prices and innovative flavors and content have led revenue to grow at an estimated annualized rate of 3.4% to \$1.3 billion over the five years to 2018 alone.”

When most people think about beef jerky, however, we probably conjure up images of “Slim Jims” or some other similar commercial product. Most beef jerky products are extremely high in carbohydrates, with up to 9 grams of sugar added to every 100 grams of the product.

When the van Blommestein family came to the United States from South Africa they quickly realized that the commercial beef jerky products found in American supermarkets simply didn't compare to the rich, South African tradition of air-dried meats such as Biltong, Droëwors, and Boerewors. The business idea originally began as a Saturday morning hobby between a father and his sons. In 2015, the company officially began sales as the van Blommestein family decided to bring traditional South African meat products to the U.S. market because Biltong and Droëwors are staple foods and an important part of the South African culture.

"(In South Africa), you can find (Biltong and Droëwors) in every grocery store, mall kiosks, gas stations, butcher shops, you name it," Wian van Blommestein, co-founder of Ayoba tells The Paleo Foundation. "When my family immigrated to the US in 2001 we couldn't find it anywhere, so we decided to dust off the family recipe book and make it for ourselves. What started as a Saturday morning hobby between myself, my brother and my dad slowly marinated into AYOKA."

The true catalyst for Ayoba's launch was the fact that the van Blommestein family saw the jerky category continuing to grow, but considered that this growth was happening with no real product innovation or added value. "The stale jerky brands were also failing to keep up with growing consumer demands like no sugar, no artificial ingredients or preservatives, and diet trends like Paleo, Keto and Whole30," Wian tells us. "We saw Biltong as a real improvement on the quality and taste that Americans were used to with jerky, so we decided to take the business from the kitchen to the marketplace."

This unique product innovation in the beef jerky market, however, didn't come without a series of challenges.

Introducing this "new" meat product to consumers in the United States required a marketing strategy to inform consumers of the upgrades over what Americans know as jerky. "We also have to educate our new customers on why Biltong is better than jerky," Wian says. "Luckily for us the product really does speak for itself when it comes to quality and taste, so after just one bite, you'll understand exactly why we say: *It's not jerky, it's Biltong™.*"

Furthermore, several other logistical challenges came with the innovative product launch. "Since Biltong is air-dried for up to fourteen days, rather than being cooked at a low temp for only six hours like jerky, there were studies that had to be done to prove to the USDA that we met all the CCP (critical control points)," Wian explains.

Once those marketing and logistical challenges were addressed, however, Ayoba was able to offer a superior and innovative product within a well-established, growing food niche that promised opportunities for financial success. Enhancing the quality of products within this industry offered the company an opportunity to differentiate itself from its competitors and carve out a niche within the industry.

2 | PACKAGING: AN IMPORTANT PART OF A WIDER BRANDING STRATEGY

Walking down the aisle of your local supermarket can be a visually stimulating experience. Almost every product, from cereal boxes to canned soups and everything in between is purposefully designed to attract the consumer's attention. Even those bland, gray egg cartons have recently experienced an

upgrade in embellishment as free-range, locally-raised producers are using packaging as a way to differentiate their product from the commercial and industrial egg and poultry industry.

The packaging that is used for virtually all products is often the first form of interaction with potential clients. While publicity and advertising campaigns both through traditional and social media can certainly be effective in communicating your product with clients, the packaging you use is the first physical form of contact. Even for businesses that spend a small fortune in advertising, lackluster and unappealing packaging can be a major reason for advertising efforts failing to “convert” into increased sales.

According to one recent study, around 63 percent of consumers [v] agree that product packaging is just as important as the brand itself. Social media and internet-based marketing and branding strategies are certainly changing how the average consumer interacts with the products they purchase. Today, many consumers want to develop a “relationship” with the brands they support and often construct aspects of their identity around their consumer choices. Despite this trend, however, the same study mentioned above finds that seven out of every ten consumers form their impression of a brand based solely on the packaging.

Holistic branding efforts should certainly focus on connecting with their customer base on a more intimate level. However, time, effort, and money also need to be focused on developing innovative and attractive packaging that can be connected to the wider branding goals and aspirations of the company. Despite our addictions to smartphones, computers, TVs, and other forms of media, most customers will first come into contact with small brands through

coincidental interaction, either through encountering products on the shelves of a retail store or through browsing the Internet. Eye-grabbing packaging, then, offers the first opportunity to persuade customers.

In terms of increasing sales, almost one-third of businesses report increased revenues after investing in improved or updated packaging. Attractive packaging can also convert into free advertising, as studies find that around four out of every ten consumers [vi] will share an image of your packaging on social media if it was unique or branded. Even for companies that operate exclusively through e-commerce platforms, an investment in high-quality packaging can attract people even through screens. In fact, over half of all consumers [vii] said that would revisit a website where they purchased an item if that item arrived with customized packaging.

In the specific case of Ayoba and their Biltong air-dried meat products, their relatively recent rebranding process was focused on upgraded packaging that includes fun colors, innovative designs, and graphic elements that help tell the unique story of the family business. Besides the new color combinations and graphic design elements, the packaging also includes several health call-outs and certifications that attract the attention of health and nutrition-conscious consumers.

Part of this rebranding strategy was focused on responding to the increasing consumer interest in healthier food options. Ayoba’s packaging reflects several health statements including the following declarations/certifications: grass-fed beef, sugar-free, gluten-free, 31 grams of protein, Whole 30 Approved, Certified Paleo, and Keto Certified.

“For us at Ayoba, authenticity and transparency are at the core of everything we do”, Wian van

Blommestein says. “We want our customers to know that they can trust we will only source the highest quality ingredients we can find, and the certifications help us illustrate that commitment. This is especially true for new customers who are unfamiliar with our brand and products. The Paleo, Keto and Whole30 certification stamps act as recognizable indicators when it comes to the quality standards of our sourcing. So in summary, the certifications help us build trust with new customers right from the first impression,” he states.

3 | LEVERAGING HEALTH AND WELLNESS CERTIFICATIONS TO ATTRACT NEW CUSTOMERS

More than ever, the average American consumer is attentive to what they put into their body. Market studies and predictions find that the health and wellness food industry is expected to grow by USD 235.94 million during 2020-2024, progressing at a CAGR of over 8 percent during the forecast period [viii]. Diabetes, coronary heart disease and obesity epidemics affecting millions of people around the country have directly led to an intensified interest in natural and organic food as part of a healthier and more active lifestyle.

The problem, of course, is that many shoppers simply don't know which products to trust when browsing the supermarket shelves. Almost all food companies understand the increasing consumer interest in healthier food options, and this has unfortunately led to exaggerated or misleading health claims on packaging.

Ayoba provides its customers with a more delicious and nutritious alternative to the typical meat snack, by using only the finest premium cuts of beef,

seasoned with natural spices, to create the highest quality beef snacks in the United States. To communicate this with their customers, however, the company has prioritized receiving the most rigorous certifications, including the ones listed above.

Over one-third of all Americans [ix] are currently following a diet, and low carb options such as the Paleo Diet, the Keto Diet, and the Whole 30 Diet are consistently increasing in popularity. Publicizing these certifications on their new packaging is one way to instantly attract the attention of millions of consumers interested in low-carb lifestyles. The eye-catching rebranding process of Ayoba, then, goes beyond catchy colors and appealing fonts. The rebranding process and the updated packaging specifically target the health-conscious consumer that is looking for a healthy snack made from natural ingredients, that has low carbs, and that actually tastes great as well.

Furthermore, the Ayoba brand also used its investment in third-party certifications as part of a specific marketing strategy to help the brand stand out from the competition.

“Obtaining the certifications allowed us to tap into the growing Paleo, Keto, and Whole30 communities in a way that was authentic,” Wian says. “They served, and still do, as a way to introduce ourselves to new customers within those communities, basically saying: *We're here because we were invited, now be our friends!* We are also very proud to be the only Biltong & Droëwors in the US that is Certified Paleo, Keto Certified, Whole30 Approved, and made with Pasture Raised Grass Fed Beef!”

Ayoba has also found that retail purchasers and buyers are showing an increased interest in third-

party certifications when choosing between products and brands within an increasingly competitive and crowded niche.

“As retailers continue to look for ways to (meet) consumer demands, new sets/sections are being created in grocery stores with themes like *healthy keto snacks*,” Wian explains. “So even if a retailer isn’t able to add us to their jerky set because maybe it’s too small, or they want more sales data first, we are able to find placement in these new themed sets, or even help them create the sets!” In this sense, investing in Keto certification and other related third-party certifications has allowed Ayoba to approach large retail markets that might otherwise have been inaccessible.

For Ayoba, the decision to invest in third-party certification did not require a distressing change in their sourcing, manufacturing, or production practices. Rather, it was more of an organic process that reflected some of the core values the company embraces. “All of our certifications play an important part in our overall goal, which is to build trust with new customers right from the start and grow that trust into long lasting relationships through authenticity and transparency,” Wian tells The Paleo Foundation.

“We have so many amazing attributes we can speak to, being Paleo, Keto, Sugar Free, Whole30, Grass Fed, etc., and what’s AYOKA* about these attributes is that they are all organic results of our quality sourcing, our unique drying methods, and our own family recipes. Meaning we do not have to sacrifice the most important attribute of them all, taste, just to make these claims. (**AYOKA is a term used to express agreement & approval. If you like something you say, “That’s AYOKA!”*).

For smaller health food brands in the beginning stages of business growth, investing in third-party certifications may offer inimitable opportunities to expand the consumer base, conquer new retail outlets, and increase brand awareness. “The only time these certifications would be hurtful to a brand is if it came at the cost of quality or taste, otherwise they can only be helpful!” Wian believes. “If the brand’s positioning/attributes are well aligned with the values of the communities built around the certifications, then getting certification is a no brainer!”

4 | AYOKA CERTIFICATIONS

- Certified Paleo
- Keto Certified
- Whole 30 Approved

5 | CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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