

# When less means more

*The NACS show was as much about what newer beverages don't contain (sugar), as what they do (you name it)*

*By Andrew Kaplan*

**W**ith all the negative press it's been getting, it probably comes as no surprise that public enemy number one at the National Association of Convenience Store (NACS) show held last month in Las Vegas seemed to be sugar, with beverages all over the vast exhibit halls touting reduced amounts of the ingredient.

For example, VPX Sports/Redline, was promoting a new energy drink called Bang, which plays up what it doesn't contain—carbs, sugar, calories or artificial colors—as much as what it does: creatine and branched chain amino acid (BCAA) infusion. As Jack Owoc, CEO and chief science officer, explained: “All of the energy drinks are basically a knock off of Red Bull with a few little tweaks here and here.” So, Owoc said, he and his team went for a formula as different as possible. “We call sugar ‘nutritional cocaine,’” he added.

Red Bull announced its own expansion to reduced caloric offerings. The brand's new Orange and Cherry Editions have no calories or sugar. In fact, Red Bull pointed out that Nielsen data shows that 59 percent of the energy category growth is coming from zero calorie flavored energy drinks.

Another healthier energy drink option is Xyience, which began as a sports nutrition and supplement company and in 2006 added the Xenergy energy drink line. It is



*Kevin Lawrence shows off his company's protein drink Power Crunch at NACS. This year's show saw several new protein drinks as consumers embrace them as a healthy alternative.*

a sugar-free, zero-calorie beverage that is made with all-natural flavors and colors.

Other drink options populating the aisles at NACS this year included bottled iced teas and lemonades, functional waters, protein-based drinks and organic beverages.

Talking Rain's blockbuster Sparkling ICE brand, for example, launched a new range of iced teas. The only zero calorie, sparkling iced

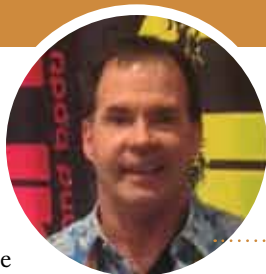
tea on the market, this lightly carbonated blend of brewed black tea, green tea and real fruit juice is available in Raspberry Tea, Lemon Tea, and Peach Tea.

Unique Beverage Co.'s Cascade Ice is a zero calorie line of organic waters, with the latest flavors being grapefruit and blueberry. The brand is available in 31 different varieties.

And King Juice's Calypso brand boasts a “Taste of the Islands” on each bottle, and includes a line of lemonades, limeades and also a line of “teamonades,” coming in varieties like Peach, Plumcot, Mangerine, Blueberry and Half & Half.

**59%**

**of the energy category growth is coming from zero-calorie flavored drinks –Nielsen data**



Splash Beverage Group (SBG) was promoting its Bruce Tea, a line of ready-to-drink tea products inspired by the blends the martial arts icon used in his daily training regimen. JKD (Jeet Kune Do) is a blend of decaffeinated black tea, ginseng, royal jelly and honey, for example. Kevin McClafferty, president, explained that Bruce Lee has become a powerful symbol to younger consumers today. “Bruce is undergoing a resurgence of his popularity. They’ve taken from him a message about being true to yourself,” he said.

As much negative publicity as there is about sugar, the opposite can be said about protein. Protein2O bottled water has no calories, 15 grams of protein and comes in flavors like Grape, Lemon and Better Splash. Another brand, Power Crunch, touts 20 grams of high-DH smart whey protein hydrolysates.

**“We call sugar ‘nutritional cocaine’.” –Jack Owoc**

And NuAquos, from New Whey Nutrition, contains a propriety blend of protein, electrolytes, vitamins and minerals. With 12 grams of protein, it promotes recovery and re-hydration. “We think one of the problems protein’s had in the past is they haven’t been able to make a good tasting product,” said Chuck Walkley, New Whey’s CEO. “Doing protein is difficult, but we have science that actually allows us to pull out the right tasting proteins with the right processes to make it taste good.”

Coffee continues to evolve into a more premium category. An example at NACS was High Brew Coffee, with its all-natural cold brew flavors Double Espresso, Mexican Vanilla, Salted Caramel and Dark Chocolate

Mocha. And, fitting in nicely with the low-sugar trend is High Brew’s new Black & Bold, a 20-calorie brew with only 1 gram of sugar.

On the CSD front, Coke was sampling Coca-Cola Life, its first reduced-calorie cola sweetened with a blend of cane sugar and stevia leaf extract resulting in a drink that contains 60 calories per 8-ounce bottle.

And Christopher Reed, CEO and founder of ginger brew marketer Reed’s, said the company is seeing sales growth in its line of Culture Club kombucha live drinks. Reed added that the convenience store channel has become a strong one for healthful drink options—including CSDs. “You want a natural version of your favorite thing,” he said. 