

Health website personalizes the grocery shopping experience

BY NATHAN DONATO-WEINSTEIN

L. Jasmine Kim has seen her future, and it doesn't include yogurt.

The CEO of ShopWell Solutions Inc. always thought the dairy product was part of a proper diet. Then she plugged her health goals into her company's website, ShopWell.com. Out popped the result: Most yogurt brands, she learned, were way too high in sugar for someone with a family history of diabetes.

AT-A-GLANCE

ShopWell Solutions Inc.

Headquarters: Palo Alto

CEO: L. Jasmine Kim

Founded: 2008

Funding: \$2 million

Employees: 12

Website: www.shopwell.com

Phone: 677-369-7457

"It really made me re-think that not all yogurt is good for me," said Kim, who was named CEO in September.

Palo Alto-based ShopWell Inc. is counting on insights like that to draw users to the site in droves when it formally launches in the first quarter of next year. The site, currently in beta, helps connect consumers to foods aligned with their dietary needs and health goals.

Investors include New Venture Partners LLC, a global venture capital firm, and IDEO, a global design consultancy that came up with the concept in 2008. Together, they have poured \$2 million into the firm since its founding last year.

Below is an edited interview that discusses Kim's strategies for the company.

Q: What is ShopWell?

A: We're the only online destination that provides nutrition and food information that's really personalized for your unique dietary needs and goals. So far each product that you look at, we provide a personalized score, from one to 100, that matches your specific needs. We give it a green, yellow and red symbol to let you know whether this is appropriate for you or not.

Q: How does ShopWell come up with the score?

A: We worked with an expert panel of registered dietitians, who scored a diverse representation of products across multiple food categories. We used the Institute of Medicine and the American Dietetic Association's generally accepted guidelines for age and gender to segment the demographic profile of the user. We created an algorithm that provides a dynamically generated match score based on selected food preferences, conditions and goals. The food match scores are from 1-100, and to make it even more simple, we color code it red, yellow or green so that the user can quickly decipher what foods are right for them. We strive to simplify the process of making health decisions as concrete as comparing prices.

Q: Can you describe a potential ShopWell user?

A: A mother who just found out her kids have a gluten allergy, wanting to find out if the cereal she purchases is good or bad. Or a 50-year-old who wants to eat heart-healthy because you're also trying to be preventive. We also have lots of people who are athletic training.



L. Jasmine Kim

Title: CEO, ShopWell Solutions Inc.

Age: 46

Birthplace: Seoul, South Korea

Family: Married, two children

Residence: San Francisco

Education: B.A. Wellesley College;

MBA, UCLA Anderson School of

Management

Career path: Brand management,

U.S. and international, Procter &

and Gamble; brand management at

UMH West Hennessy Louis Nat-

ure; international marketing and

sales development at Yahoo Inc.;

GM/SVP of BabyCenter LLC

FOR COOKING

BETTER LIVING: ShopWell CEO L. Jasmine Kim has a website that helps people make smart nutritional choices with their foods. Here she uses the new app, which reads food labels and helps shoppers make informed decisions based on individual nutritional goals.

Q: What's your model to generate revenue?

A: In the long run, the real monetization model is to provide subscription-model research analytics, almost like Google Analytics for the food industry. We'll have different pricing levels for different sizes of the client as well as different levels of insights they want. In the short run, to build the critical consumer mass, we'll be using the tried and true marketing for coupons, product inserts and sponsorships.

Q: How's that different from other sites?

A: Most companies are looking to monetize directly through consumers. Because of relationships we have with senior people in the industry, we really believe we're the only one looking to provide this real-time, on-demand consumer insights and analysis to grocers and food brand marketers.

Q: Why is this kind of data important?

A: Food-brand marketers are always looking at data for the fact. When you go to the grocery store, I don't know whether your sister's staying with you, or you're buying the food for a roommate. I don't know why it was bought, and I don't know what decision process you went through.

Q: How might a food company put your insights to work?

A: If I am ConAgra Foods, and I know I'm marketing my stuff to heart-healthy people, you could track all the products that they're looking for. And then if you find

out that your products are not in their considered set, then you know you might have to change your market or your product.

Q: What about the existing nutritional information already on packages. Isn't that sufficient?

A: The nutrition panel you see for each product is based on a 2,000-calorie diet, typically for an average male. The same way I never met an average American, I never met an average 2,000-calorie-a-day diet.

Q: What additional features are you working on?

A: We just launched a personalized nutrition label. So if you give us your weight, height and activity level, you will receive the nutrition label specifically for you. We're also coming out with a mobile app so at the point of purchase you could scan a product and a personalized score is provided.

Q: What's your timeline for profitability?

A: We believe it will take about 12 to 18 months to reach critical mass.

Q: How has your experience prepared you?

A: Having worked at Yahoo and at BabyCenter, I was very aware of the trends happening in the health and wellness area. And as a marketer, I knew how inefficient and ineffective some of the data is that's available to those who work in the food industry.

NATHAN DONATO-WEINSTEIN is a freelance writer.



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