

It's the real deal

A father and his sons created Unreal to reinvent their favorite snacks

by ERIN SILVER



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Unreal's story begins in the late 2000s, when brothers Kristopher and Nicky Bronner went out trick-or-treating on Halloween and came back with their haul of candy.

"The next day, their dad, Michael Bronner, confiscated all their candy," explains Unreal CEO Kevin McCarthy, who came on board in 2014 and assumed the role of CEO in 2016. "Michael didn't want them eating treats made with artificial colors, lots of sugar and preservatives."

The boys wanted to know why foods that taste so good had to be bad for you. Inspired by that, the three Bronners decided to challenge that notion. Though he had no experience in the food business, Michael was an entrepreneur who had previously founded Digitas (a digital advertising agency) and Upromise (a college savings program), and he sensed an opportunity. He and his sons worked with a chef and began testing recipes for chocolates that could be enjoyed without guilt. "They used real ingredients and less sugar to develop chocolates that tasted just as good as the products already on store shelves," says McCarthy.

In 2011, the Boston-based Bronners officially launched their company. Thanks to lots of startup funding and buy-in from major celebrities like John Legend and Gisele Bündchen, who, McCarthy says, "are just really big fans of what we are doing here," the trio began manufacturing

Unreal chocolate snacks. Since then, they've created an entire line of treats, including chocolate coconut bars that are lower in sugar and made with no artificial ingredients, compared to other conventional treats.

Today, Michael serves as chairman of the company, while Kristopher works on product development. (Nicky has moved on to other endeavors.) And Unreal has remained true to its original mission: All of its chocolates are made with simple, clean ingredients, like organic peanut butter and coconut. Instead of artificial dyes, their colored candies are coated with colors derived from natural ingredients such as beets and spirulina. The company also keeps sugar to a minimum, with no fillers or artificial sweeteners. In fact, Unreal's Dark Chocolate Coconut Minis, sold in Costco warehouses, have only 3 grams of sugar per bar. Unreal also uses fair-trade ingredients, which means farmers are guaranteed safe working conditions and sustainable wages.

Of course, taste has always been a top priority. "No matter how clean, organic or simple any indulgent item is, it has to taste amazing, especially when it comes to chocolate," says McCarthy. "We're trying to create love at first bite. It's cheesy, but it has a nice ring." ■

Erin Silver is a freelance writer in Toronto.

COMPANY INFO

Name Unreal

CEO Kevin McCarthy

Employees 30

Items carried at Costco

Dark Chocolate Coconut Minis. Item 1268728. Warehouses/ Costco.com

Quote about Costco

"Costco is transparent, super reliable and they never drop the ball. We've been working with Costco for years and [the company is] amazing to work with."

—Kevin McCarthy

