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KEY PLAYERS 2011



J.V.M. Sales looks to expand presence of Milano's brand with fresh packaging, marketing

By Alyssa Sowerwine

LINDEN, N.J. — J.V.M. Sales Corp. is no stranger to the cheese business.

A family owned and operated company since 1983, J.V.M. — which does business under the Milano's Cheese Corp. brand name — operates a 75,000-square-foot Italian cheese manufacturing plant in Linden, N.J.

Anthony Caliendo, vice president of sales and marketing for Milano's Cheese Corp., works closely with Mary Beth Tomasino, co-founder of J.V.M. Sales Corp. about 25 years ago. Tomasino became sole owner of the company last fall.

Tomasino has more than 30 years of experience in the cheese manufacturing industry, and she attributes all of her knowledge and success to her father, who taught her about the full spectrum of the industry.

"Our name, Milano's, is our brand identity," she says. "We've been using it since 1983 and now that it has become our registered mark and registered DBA, we will continue in our efforts into making it a global, household brand going into the next century."

Caliendo, whose father used to run 50 to 60 percent of the sales at J.V.M., joined the company after leaving the mortgage business more than three years ago and, along with business manager Krystal Harvey, is focusing on building up the

marketing side of the company.

Caliendo recently announced that Milano's is forming a Global Broker and Regional Sales Force, for which he will recruit nationally. The sales force will be responsible for increasing awareness and sales for the Milano's brand through distributors across the United States and abroad.

He adds that as the company continues to grow and forge new relationships, it needs a dedicated team that can cater to each market's individual needs.

"We're in a position right now to really make a run at this," Caliendo says. "I think companies out there will find out that we are definitely the company to work with when it comes to providing the best service, best product and exactly what is needed to make them happy."

Milano's offers a full line of grated Italian hard cheeses, including domestic or imported grated Parmesan; domestic or imported grated Romano; grated Asiago; grated Parmesan & Romano blend; and Grated 3 Cheese blend.

The company also offers custom blending, private label programs, flexible packaging, product diversity and nationwide distribution.

In order to reposition the brand, Caliendo worked with Tomasino and designer Ricky Green to revamp the labels and art-

work on Milano's packaging — as well as on its website, www.milanoscheesecorp.com — to make the brand name clearer. They are utilizing brighter colors to make labels on the company's 1-pound bags and 16- and 8-ounce jars "pop."

"The Milano's retail packaging has definitely changed over the years from a very muted and subdued design to very colorful and eye-catching," Tomasino says. "I am very inspired by the new artwork on our packaging. I think it's going to appear very attractive to the consumer and looks great on the shelves."

Milano's also offers a colorful retail display unit to showcase its products in stores.

Caliendo notes the company also is in development stages for some new items, including a Parmesan-Romano cheese with other spice blends — such as basil, herbs, pepper or jalapeno — for sale at retail.

"We want to come up with something that revolutionizes the Italian cheese business," he says.

Milano's also will be debuting a new bag with ziplock closure at the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA) show June 5-7 in Anaheim, Calif.

Caliendo notes a priority for Milano's Cheese is meeting food safety and quality benchmarks. Last October, the company

achieved Safe Quality Food (SQF) 2000 Level 2 certification, and this year plans to apply for the SQF 2000 Level 3 audit.

He adds that Milano's last year received an "excellent" rating on its Silliker Good Manufacturing Practices and Food Safety Systems audit; was approved to provide kosher certified and organic products; and became an Approved Food Establishment for U.S. Armed Forces procurement.

The company also is working on new biodegradable packaging. And this year, Milano's was declared LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) compliant and achieved certification from the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), which will give company executives access to special training provided by WBENC.

As Milano's Cheese Corp. continues to grow, Caliendo says he is looking to expand into global markets in the next five years, noting the company's shelf stable products allow for massive shipping overseas.

"My goal is to bring the name out there and build up the company," he says. "When people think of Italian cheese, we want them to think of Milano's."