

Mustard on tap (yes, mustard) at this store. How the recipe for success is much simpler than you imagined

Condiment entrepreneurs eye small stores as profitable niche, but wholesaling is key to survival.

By Adrienne Pasquarelli

Heatonist may well be the hottest store to open in the city this spring—and not just because it sells 150 varieties of hot sauce. The Williamsburg shop, which debuted last month, sells hot sauce—and only hot sauce. Owner Noah Chaimberg believes that single-minded focus will be his recipe for success.

Like the billboards of Times Square or the brick-and-mortar locations of e-commerce startups, these shops also double as marketing for brands eager to expand in an artisanal age of specialty food manufacturing.



“To be known for doing one thing better than anything else is the ultimate goal of branding,” said restaurant consultant Arlene Spiegel.

“Because urban dwellers especially are very fickle, they want to be able to get the best of whatever they’re in the mood for—in a world of overpromises and underdelivery.”

The concept certainly works well in New York, where tourists and residents alike pride themselves on their culinary sophistication and seek out products they can’t get anywhere else. But paying \$9 for a 4-ounce jar of mayonnaise may not resonate elsewhere.

Risky approach

Most of the stores are small, requiring just a few hundred square feet of space. Maille takes up 600 square feet, while Empire’s shop—where all products are made on-site—is half that size.

The approach, of course, is risky if the single item a store focuses on doesn’t deliver. When Nutella opened a shop in food marketplace Eataly last May, consumers rejoiced at the accessibility to the popular hazelnut spread. But they quickly complained that the store was boring and overhyped, and the product too expensive. It closed after six months, never earning more than two and a half stars on Yelp.

“You need to make sure your product can differentiate itself,” said Ms. Spiegel. “People will and do pay more for products that are worth it.”