

## Why Popchips Is Finally Advertising On TV



Popchips, the seven-year-old potato chip maker, will for the first time advertise on television to try to win over the hearts, minds, and taste buds of American snackers.

The company, whose marketing has focused more on digital video and celebrity endorsements, will start its new campaign Monday night on NBC's season premiere of "The Voice."

The shift in strategy comes as popchips is going through a sales slump. In the 52 weeks ended Sept. 7, popchips brought in \$53.6 million in sales, down 18% from the year-earlier period, according to research firm IRI. Popchips says the drop stems from the decision to increase the amount of their product in packages by 15%, a conversion that is now complete but cost a "couple of months of sales."

The task of bringing popchips to a wider audience falls to Chief Marketing Officer Marc Seguin, who recently joined the company from Paramount Farms' Wonderful Pistachios, another brand in the healthy and salty snack market. CMO Today chatted with Mr. Seguin about how popchips thinks about TV versus digital advertising, how to compete with other snack brands, and what the biggest challenges are for CMOs these days. (This interview has been edited for clarity.)

### Why did popchips decide to go to TV?

We're really excited to take what we think is a compelling message: that popchips is a delicious chip with all the flavor but half the fat of a fried chip. We've had a lot of success in the coastal markets doing some experiential marketing and getting people to try this product first hand. We want to take the message everywhere. We know the best way to do that is through TV.

### But why go to TV now after years of [focusing on celebrity endorsements](#) and online advertising?

This brand is not really old. It was launched in 2007. As it built its market and began to get consumers engaged, they did that where there was a lot of density in the urban centers along the coasts. They found that people reacted well to the message. We looked at how we can take that message to a broader audience across the country. It's difficult to have an event in every city of the country and reach people who haven't heard about us yet. We looked for a way to reach people both effectively and efficiently and in a way that could capture the essence of the popchips brand. TV as a medium really allowed us to do the things we wanted to do to communicate the brand in a fun way.

### Snack food is obviously a really competitive space. How do you distinguish yourself?

The salty snack category size and scale is gigantic. There are some segments within that where we think we have competitive place to play. And consumers have told us we have a reason to be there. When you look at the subcategory that we particularly focus on, which is the "better for you" items within the salty snack space, that's about a \$1 billion market. It continues to show great growth. What that shows to us is that there's a consumer need out there for products that are snack-able, crave-able, that are also better for you.

### But competitors these days are making their own "popped" chips.

They've recognized as we have that popped is a great way to not use oil when you're making the product. It doesn't take away from the taste. There's always been fried chips which people have known for a hundred years. Then they launched baked chips, which don't really taste very good. We found a way to make a chip that has a flavor of fried chips but doesn't have the fat. They recognized as we do that it's a great place to play.

### A lot of advertisers are moving more money into the digital space. Popchips is entering the TV space. How do you think about your media mix?

We've always been a strong proponent of digital advertising. It's been a place where we've built a lot of our momentum throughout the years. We have a strong emphasis on making sure it's a place we can have real-time conversations and relationships with our consumers. It's going to continue to be an important part of what we do. But in terms of being able to reach a lot of people all at once, there's still not really a strong analog to television. There's not another way to go where you can reach people quickly with a strong visual and an impactful message that brings to life your brand.

### Who is your target snacker and where can we expect to see your TV ads?

Our target consumer is women basically 25 to 50. The truth is, almost the entire country snacks all the time. The shift from sit-down meals to snacking throughout the day is changing the way everyone thinks about food. So we're targeting all those folks. When we picked our TV, we wanted stuff that reached women but also had a good general market appeal. We'll be on a show like "The Blacklist," "Parenthood," those types of things. We're going to do a good mix of prime, where we can reach a broad audience with our message, and then we'll do some more focused stuff [on] cable: Bravo, E, those types of places. We have a strong media plan over the next seven weeks. I think if people are watching TV at all they're going to see our commercials.

### What's the biggest challenge you face as a CMO?

From my standpoint, it's the myriad of ways you have to reach out and touch the consumer. It's gotten exponentially more complicated because people are connected 24/7. You can never have a static point of view of what's working in the world in terms of reaching people with your message. You have to be evaluating it in real time. You can't even do it once a year, you have to be doing it monthly, or weekly, to make sure you're on top of the most effective way to reach consumers in a meaningful way.