

# Advertising Age<sup>®</sup>

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## AMERICA'S HOTTEST BRANDS

From marketers that relied on clever old-school marketing with big campaigns to the upstarts that have broken through with a combination of ingenuity, luck and word of mouth, these brands helped put the sizzle in 2010



### popchips

Keith Belling, CEO

By: Rupal Parekh

For years, Keith Belling visited the same deli nearly every day, carrying out the same routine: buy a bag of fried potato chips, eat them, feel guilty, repeat.

"I'm a snacker," said Mr. Belling, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur turned CEO of popchips. "I knew I shouldn't be eating fried chips, but I'm just not a fan of baked chips as much as I tried them." So in 2007, he set out to find the holy grail of snacking. What he found wasn't just a new chip brand, it was a whole new category.

"I was convinced you were not able to tell a consumer you can have a healthy fried chip or a good-tasting baked chip," he said. As the name indicated, popchips are neither baked nor fried, but popped via a combination of heat and pressure

(not all that different from popcorn).

Once he was happy with the product, months were spent interviewing between 20 and 30 package-design firms before hiring Turner Duckworth to give popchips a brand identity and brightly colored snack bags. While it's used a variety of advertising agencies, including San Francisco-

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based Pereira & O'Dell and now New York's KraftWorks, its grassroots marketing approach, a blend of hyperlocal and social marketing, has stayed largely the same.

One addition to popchips' outreach is celebrity spokesman Ashton Kutcher, who approached popchips earlier this year. "He was a fan of the brand, and we were doing a round of financing, and Ashton, through a

mutual friend, said he'd be interested in investing." Then he said he wanted to be the company's "President of Pop Culture" and help shape the brand's social-media strategy. "I assumed I was getting punk'd," Mr. Belling said.

Popchips have been picked up for distribution nationally by Target stores,

Whole Foods, Jamba Juice, 24 Hour Fitness gyms, and are served on Virgin Airlines.

The company, which projects 100% growth to over \$40 million in revenues for this year, is already making a significant dent in the \$5 billion to \$6 billion category. That's making it the model for smaller companies that are now trying to get a toehold in the popped chip category.