

Yoplait Targets Chobani in NYC Stunt

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NEW YORK (AP) — Yoplait Greek is setting up a pop-up store in New York City to win over customers with free samples — right around the corner from Chobani's yogurt shop.

The move is part of an aggressive push by General Mills to gain ground in the fast-growing Greek yogurt market. The Minneapolis company had been late to the game, having introduced its Yoplait Greek in just 2010. But even that turned out to be a false start and it came out with a new version last year that it says tastes better.

"We didn't get it right with the first one," concedes Liza Dopp, marketing manager for Yoplait Greek.

General Mills Inc. is apparently confident enough to stand by the new version, making a taste test with Chobani the centerpiece of its new marketing campaign that includes TV spots. Starting Thursday, people in New York City will be able to compare the brands at the Yoplait Greek store in New York's trendy Soho neighborhood.

The three-day operation may not have as much sting as intended, however, since the nearby Chobani shop has been closed for renovations since Christmas. It's not scheduled to re-open until Saturday, which is the last day of the Yoplait Greek store.

"We didn't know that," said Dopp in an interview.

Chobani opened its shop in 2012 as a way to add luster to its image. Customers can order yogurt dishes topped with ingredients such as cucumber and olive oil that are assembled on the spot and served in glass bowls. The renovated shop will offer a bigger menu that includes sandwiches, soups and coffee, according to a representative.

Chobani is the leader in the Greek yogurt segment but has been experiencing some growing pains more recently. Last year, the privately held company had to issue a recall after finding a mold at its Idaho plant was causing some containers to swell and go bad. Whole Foods Market Inc. also recently said it would stop carrying Chobani in its stores to make room for other varieties that aren't as widely available.

As for Yoplait's latest gambit, Peter McGuinness, chief marketing officer for Chobani, noted that the company has been challenged by its competitors before.

"For us, consumers matter most and we're proud they've made us America's No. 1 Greek yogurt," he said in an email.

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