

## **The Hyppo CEO talks landmark deal with Publix, brand expansion**

By Dahlia Ghabour  
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The chance to stock on Publix shelves is a chance most independent retailers would jump at. When the email came in October, Hyppo CEO Stephen DiMare said that he was shocked.

"I was so shocked they reached out to us because most small companies would cut off their left hands to try and get that meeting," DiMare said. "But I've been in this business long enough to remain cautiously optimistic. The champagne corks stayed firmly in place."

The deal has proceeded, though: Publix is in the mist of slowly rolling out the addition to stock two-packs of Hyppo popsicles at 405 stores, about a third of the grocer's total footprint in the southeast. While most of the stores are in Florida, Hyppo pops in five flavors will be stocked at Publix stores in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and Alabama.

The pops are still made by hand in St. Augustine, then boxed up for Publix to collect and distribute from its own warehouses, DiMare said. He said that the biggest thing that interested Publix about the pops was that they are Florida-made and that retail stores exist that serve Florida customers. Plus the "exacting amount of detail" Publix puts into its distribution planning was comforting.

"In the short term, this means we can make a positive step toward our mission, 'change the world one pop at a time,'" DiMare said. "This could be a real milestone for us to head toward a broader distribution. Or it could be a one-year thing. But either way we are accomplishing our mission in a better way."

The brand has continued to fine-tune as it has grown. Popsicle pricing has been recently adjusted: instead of all product being the same price, some are cheaper or more expensive to reflect the expense of their ingredients. The website has been updated and shipping options adjusted, too: now customers in the Southeast will benefit most from free shipping tiers.

Meanwhile, the brand's newest label, Mayday Ice Cream, continues to expand. In addition to the flagship at 1835 US1 South and the location in San Marco, it now has a third location at 100 St. George St. in St. Augustine and a fourth in the works at River City Marketplace. An online component to Mayday is in the works as well.

The Hyppo flagship store at 1765 Tree Blvd., which underwent a revamp last May, is "exactly what we imagined for the space," DiMare said, and has become "one of the major points of engagement with the community for our brand."

"I don't know what's next," DiMare said. "We're going to keep watching this Publix thing and see what kind of demand it puts on us as the weather warms up and we start reordering. I'll be cautious about any other expansion until we can see what kind of demand it'll have on our factory."