



Up Close With... O.N.E Natural Experience
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by Elizabeth Fuhrman

O.N.E. Coffee
Berry Juice

Natural beverages from the exotically familiar

Coconut water may seem foreign to many U.S. consumers, but O.N.E. Natural Experience, Los Angeles, made O.N.E. Coconut Water, as well as Acai, Coffee Berry and Cashew Juices, beverages that are growing nationwide.

O.N.E.'s products sound exotic, but the explanation lies with Rodrigo Veloso, the company's well-traveled founder and chief executive officer. A native of Brazil, Veloso studied in Stockholm, Sweden, and worked on his MBA there. While in Sweden, the student often traveled back to Brazil, and he kept noticing the tremendous amount of exotic and functional superfoods native to Brazil.

"Coconut water was the one that caught my attention the most," Veloso says. "... It's extremely hydrating. It has more electrolytes than Gatorade and more potassium than a banana."

Coconut water also was becoming extremely popular in Brazil, he says. The beverage even had begun appearing in major international quick-service food chains as part of meal combos.

Inspired by what Brazil had to offer, for the last year of his MBA, Veloso studied as a Swedish exchange student in Brazil and wrote a business plan on how to introduce exotic functional beverages to the United States and Europe. With this business plan, Veloso won his business school's competition, and then Brazil's competition and then all of Latin America. He then competed in the annual business plan competition at the University of Texas at Austin. When he was presenting, he had the chance to meet investors who were excited about the idea, he says. "That's what really made me sure that the business has so much potential that it would work," he says.

In 2005, Veloso moved to California and started O.N.E., a company aimed at fulfilling the demand for nutritional products in the U.S. market by providing a line of better-for-you beverages that serve as healthier and natural alternatives to sports drinks, energy drinks, sodas, and enhanced and bottled waters. The company initially was self-funded from the sale of Veloso's coffee business in Sweden.

In the early days, the founder handled the entire business, including managing imports, distributing and performing demonstrations at stores to educate consumers. The demos allowed Veloso to introduce O.N.E. Coconut Water to the market, "not only as an exotic flavor, but explaining to consumers the health benefits and the functionality of coconut water," he says.

O.N.E. Coconut Water is all natural, and contains five electrolytes (calcium, potassium, phosphorous, magnesium and sodium). It offers 670 grams of potassium and 60 calories per 11-ounce container. The beverage is made with the water inside a young green coconut. The water is extracted from the coconut at approximately seven months, before the meat grows, and the coconut water is naturally filtered through dense coconut fibers creating the isotonic beverage. While the meat of the coconut (from which coconut milk and oils are extracted) is rich in fat and protein, O.N.E. Coconut Water contains no fat.

O.N.E. Coconut Water initially launched in Whole Foods Markets in Southern California, and in less than two and a half years became one of the best selling beverages in the stores in Southern California, Veloso says.

"When we launched two and a half years ago, coconut water was basically only found in ethnic stores," he explains. "It was found in South American stores and Southeast Asian stores, but it was truly unknown by the natural foods consumer — those that we are targeting the most."

O.N.E.'s next launch was Amazon Acai, which released in 2006. O.N.E. Amazon Acai is produced in Brazil with fresh fruit, rather than frozen or clarified concentrates. The beverage is blended with acerola, and offers vitamins B and E, calcium, iron and omega-3, 6 and 9 fatty acids, in addition to anthocyanins, which act as antioxidants.

This year, O.N.E. further expanded its portfolio with Coffee Berry and Cashew Juices. Being a fifth-generation coffee farmer, Veloso grew up eating the little coffee berries at his family farm in Brazil. Despite the popularity of coffee in the United States, Veloso couldn't understand why the berry of the coffee plant had been largely overlooked. The antioxidant-packed coffee berry is

actually the bright red, fleshy fruit that surrounds the bean, he explains. The fruit is highly perishable, but after four years, Veloso secured a way to bring coffee berry in juice form to the United States.

O.N.E. Coffee Berry Juice is a blend of whole coffee berry, strawberry and acerola purees and organic evaporated cane juice. Coffee Berry Juice is 100 percent natural and contains a similar amount of caffeine as a cup of green tea, the company says. The juice contains 950 percent of the recommended daily value of vitamin C and 107 calories per 11-ounce serving.

"The main taste of the product is coffee berry itself, but we add a splash of strawberry and acerola to make the taste a little bit more familiar to the American palate, however, maintaining the functionality of the coffee berry," Veloso says.

In addition to Coffee Berry Juice, O.N.E. released Cashew Juice, a juice made from the fruit of the cashew plant, not the nut. Unlike the cashew nut, O.N.E. Cashew Juice is non-allergenic and is fat free, the company says. "Very few people know that the cashew is actually a fruit and the cashew nut is just the seed of the cashew fruit," he says.

A 100 percent natural beverage with a fresh, light and sweet tropical flavor, Cashew Juice contains beta-carotene, calcium, iron and vitamins C, B1, B2 and B3.

"Whenever you have vitamin C and iron together, your body is able to absorb both elements much faster," Veloso says. "As well, cashew juice has approximately half the acidity of orange juice, so it's much, much easier on the stomach."

Although coffee berry and cashew fruits are exotic, their fruit names offer the benefit of being familiar to American consumers. "Everybody already eats nuts and drinks coffee, but it's just very interesting whenever we are doing demos to see people's faces and see how curious they are about both products," Veloso says.

A natural edge

O.N.E.'s beverages currently appear in more than 5,000 retailers nationwide, including Whole Foods Markets, Kroger and specialty stores. Its strongest area is still the West Coast, but the East Coast and Florida sales have been growing rapidly. The company targets health-conscious and natural-products consumers.

"We believe those consumers are influencers and early adopters," Veloso says. "Since obviously the vast majority of our line is fruits that are popular with Latin Americans, South Americans and Southeast Asians, we are not neglecting the ethnic market at all, but we are putting the emphasis on the mainstream American consumer."

O.N.E. is forecasting strong growth in conventional supermarkets, Veloso says, "as we believe now that natural and conventional are merging."

The line is currently all natural, but in addition, Acai, Cashew and Coffee Berry Juices contain organic evaporated cane juice. O.N.E. has plans to make all its beverages organic. "We are working with our suppliers and some of our products are already organic," Veloso says. "We just don't have the certification yet."

Along with working toward organic certification, O.N.E. works very closely with Global Innovations for Fair Trade (GIFFT), and the company is pushing to achieve Fair Trade certification for all its beverages. In addition, Veloso sits on GIFFT's board of directors.

With the company's focus on social responsibility and the environment, Veloso decided to package all O.N.E. beverages in 11-ounce Tetra Pak cartons. "When I was initially doing research in order to find the best beverage container for our product, I was very impressed with Tetra Pak's environmental profile," he says.

In addition, the aseptic container does not require preservatives, and it does not need to be refrigerated in order to remain fresh, which allows O.N.E. to have a smaller carbon footprint, Veloso says. O.N.E. Coconut Water has a 10-month shelf life and its three other beverages are fresh for one year.

This June, the company also took its package and charitable causes to the next level with the release of a limited-edition Romero Britto designed package for O.N.E. Coconut Water. With the limited-edition beverage, O.N.E. is donating its profits to New York City-based Brazil Foundation's "Solution for Life in Semi-Arid Lands." The program is working to bring potable water to an area of Brazil from which O.N.E. buys its fruit.

"During the draught season, truly families are walking up to five miles to collect clean drinking water," Veloso says. "What we are doing is building hundreds of cisterns that collect rain water and are able to store this drinkable, fresh water for up to eight months."

"It's our intention every year to have a partnership with a different not-for-profit and donate profits off of one of our products to a particular charity that we believe in for both Brazil and the United States," he adds.

As the company's social responsibility plans grow, the company also will be preparing for more growth. O.N.E. recently expanded into Canada, and while the company continues to increase distribution in the United States, it is planning to enter the European market. The 16-person company also plans to release a few new SKUs next year. **BI**