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I'm a sucker for a good origin story, and the one for the Wm Wrigley Jr. Company is one worth chewing on for sure. It started almost by accident when, in the 1890s, William Wrigley Jr. moved to Chicago with about \$30 and a talent for marketing. He originally sold soap and baking powder. To encourage retailers to buy his products, he offered premiums -first things like coffee grinders, and then ...chewing gum.



The surprising part was that customers became more interested in the gum giveaway than either his soap or baking powder, so Wrigley quickly pivoted his business entirely toward chewing gum.

By 1893, he launched two famous brands:

- Juicy Fruit
- Wrigley's Spearmint

Both became huge sellers in the United States. Wrigley's success came from aggressive advertising and branding at a time when national consumer brands were still relatively new and infrequent. The company spent enormous sums on:

- newspaper ads
- billboards
- free samples
- branded storefront signs

By 1926 the initial success of the company provided the financial backing to build -and name- Wrigley Field. With a seating capacity of almost 42,000 spectators, the number of chewed pieces stuck to the bottom of seats is almost incalculable. Today, it is the second oldest active Major League Baseball stadium after Fenway Park.

Beyond a quality chomp-able product, Wrigley can also be credited for having pioneered direct marketing. He mailed free gum samples and even sent retailers display materials at no charge. During World War II, his gum became associated with American soldiers because it was included in military rations, to relieve soldiers of tension and dry throats on long marches. G.I.'s used Wrigley's chewed gum to patch jeep tires, life rafts and even parts of airplanes. With over 16 million men in uniform, Wrigley became synonymous with gum and returning soldiers helped spread the brand nationally in the post-war period.

Interestingly, Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company kept the price of its standard five-stick pack of gum at 5 cents for more than half a century (similar to the old 5-cent bottle of Coca Cola). But by 1971 the cost of inflation

and rising production costs had Wrigley increase the price to 7 cents, giving new meaning to the term "getting your 2 cents worth in".

Today, Wrigley is owned by Mars Incorporated after a \$23B USD acquisition in 2008. It produces nearly 10 billions sticks of gum per year (to the chagrin of school teachers everywhere no doubt) and is a staple of American culture whose bubble has yet to burst.

Thanks for reading!

Martin

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