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## The culturization of yogurt

by [Valerie Killifer](#) \* • 05 Sep 2007

When a little-known frozen yogurt shop opened in West Hollywood in 2005, Californians from the Valley to the Hills (Beverly Hills) couldn't get enough.

Pinkberry unsettled an otherwise quiet neighborhood and gave health-minded patrons the ability to indulge. It also reinvigorated consumers' taste for frozen yogurt.

Since the launch of TCBY more than 25 years ago, frozen yogurt has experienced a pop-culture roller-coaster ride of popularity. But with the launch of several new frozen-yogurt concepts, and the success of existing custard chains such as Culver's, the segment has completed its latest uphill climb and is once again ready for accelerated growth.

Pinkberry's owner told the Los Angeles Times on Aug. 4, 2007, that she understands the consumer desire for low-calorie, healthy food. And she's not alone.

Concepts such as TCBY and Beautiful Brands International are banking on that same mentality for the success of and launch of their premium and frozen yogurt concepts, Yovana and FreshBerry, respectively.

Yovana brand manager Rob Hanson said the concept was created in response to consumer health trends and features proprietary premium and frozen yogurt offerings in addition to yogurt-based smoothies.

"Yovana took TCBY's expertise in yogurt beyond frozen yogurt and presented a healthier alternative to consumers," Hanson said. "I think it fits very well with where consumers are going."

Yovana has four open locations, two in airport locales and two standalones, but Hanson said the concept is still in the test phase.

"Really, we're refining the concept," he said. "We're making sure the menu is right and everything operationally flows the way it should."

FreshBerry as well is in its infancy.



The first location is slated to open in October after sitting in concept development for about a year.

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"The public is ready for a reinvention of frozen yogurt," said Carolyn Archer, senior vice president of operations for Beautiful Brands. "FreshBerry is the antithesis of the yogurt shops of the 1980s and 1990s. The whole idea is light, refreshing and really healthy. It's the new wave of yogurt shops that's going to hit the country."

### The berry of it all

If the success of Pinkberry is any indication, consumers are more than ready for a frozen-yogurt resurgence — and healthful toppings are leading the way.

While ice cream and gelato shops offer toppings such as gummy worms and candy bar crumbles, yogurt concepts such as Yovana, FreshBerry and Washington, D.C.-based Sweetgreen are capitalizing on fruit, nut and granola toppings trends.

Hanson said Yovana's most popular topping is fresh fruit, which fits with the trend Beautiful Brands is seeing, too.

Darren Tristano, executive vice president for Chicago's Technomic Information Services, said yogurt concepts are successfully capitalizing on healthful toppings instead of ones bogged down with preservatives and sugary syrups.

Unique flavors also are driving the segment.

Pinkberry only offers two flavors — plain and green tea — but there is plenty of room for innovation, Archer said.

"The Italians have been doing gelato in herbal flavors for decades," she said. "And that's coming over into the U.S. People are more adventurous in trying new flavors."

Tristano also believes Korean-style yogurt concepts, such as Sweetgreen and Pinkberry, will continue to spread across the United States.

"We'll see more of them and they'll branch out more from the West Coast and areas popular with smoothies and ice cream and traditional frozen custard," he said.

Pinkberry alone has 21 locations in California and New York, with plans for 50 more by the end of 2007. And another concept, Red Mango (with more than 130 locations in South Korea), made its U.S. debut this fall in Los Angeles.

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