



# Mars Says 'Thank You' Via Walmart

New platform turns slow summer period for chocolate into one of M&M's biggest seasons at mass merchant

By Dan Ochwat

MCLEAN, Va. — Summer can be tough on the chocolate category as consumers tend to shy away from a candy that melts in the heat, says **Mars Inc.'s** Allisha Watkins. But a new platform for M&M's and **Walmart** dedicated to the troops during the Memorial Day/summer timeframe proved so successful that it is becoming the brand's "fifth season."

The inaugural effort ran May 7 through July 8 and celebrated the 75th anniversary of the M&M's brand. It tapped into the history of the brand — the candies were created during World War II as a sweet treat for the military away from home. "Since then, for 75 years, we

have continued to put M&M's in rations for our troops," says Watkins, Mars' Walmart shopper marketing team lead. "Not only those who are serving but those who have served."

The "Say Thank You" platform leans on the action that for every one M&M's, Snickers or Skittles SKU purchased online or in-store at Walmart, Mars sends another one to military troops. A real-time tracker on a dedicated page on Walmart.com tallied the pounds of chocolate that were donated; the end results being 1,816,828 pounds, an average of 600 pounds per store.

The partners will launch the second installment of the platform in May 2017. "We have been tasked by Walmart to grow two [times] with this program because it was so successful," Watkins says. "It is becoming the fifth season [with Valentine's Day, Easter, Halloween and



# Mars

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holiday] and will easily take over holiday in terms of scale and volume across the category.”

Some sneak peek changes to the 2017 platform include pallet presence in Action Alley – in addition to the previously secured 12 feet of incremental space in the summer seasonal aisle – and leveraging “bigger opportunities through experiences and influencers.”

appearances, a photo backdrop, a station where shoppers could hand-write a letter to be shipped to someone serving, and the National Guard bringing in military members to the events.

Mars worked with **Operation Gratitude**, a nonprofit organization that creates and sends M&M's candy and letter care packages to the military. More than 10,000 handwritten letters came out of the retail events. “We do this at our national sales meeting,” says Watkins. “I wanted to bring that and replicate it for our shoppers because it is pretty powerful. You get a piece of paper and a ‘thank you,’



Activation of the Mars/M&M's “Say Thank You” platform at Walmart included events outside stores and at NASCAR races as well as Gas Station TV videos and in-store activity such as aisle violators and endcaps.



Mars worked with its agency – Westport, Connecticut-based **Catapult** – on the omnichannel rollout that leveraged digital and social and included a partnership with **Triad Retail Media**, Chicago, and Walmart.com for WMX media banners, the live tracker and a way to write a digital letter to someone serving in the military. **Collective Bias**, Rogers, Arkansas, managed national social influencers who created summer-themed recipes using M&M's.

At 3,000 retail stores, displays appeared in the take-home candy aisle, the seasonal aisle and front-of-store impulse areas. There was also an endcap with customized red, white and blue bottles of M&M's chocolates, a saddlebag kit that sits near the frozen section and in-aisle signage.

In addition, Walmart TV played a spot featuring NASCAR driver Kyle Busch encouraging shoppers to give thanks to the troops. That video also played on **Gas Station TV**, Detroit. Radio, a half-page FSI that aligned with the national advertising and a full-page ad in the Arkansas-based magazine *Peekaboo* also supported the campaign.

Some of the most powerful elements were the retailtainment events at 405 military-based Walmart stores and a few NASCAR races. The events included character

and you don't know who it's going to but the impact that can have on a person who has been away from home can be pretty cool.”

Other results from the inaugural platform included: 62,000 views to the Collective Bias blogger network, a measure of 88.9 million impressions. More than 13,000 views were collected on the dedicated page at Walmart.com, and nearly 14 million impressions were reached over Gas Station TV, exceeding the anticipation of 12 million. **SM**

**BRAND:** M&M's

**RETAILER:** Walmart

**KEY INSIGHTS:** M&M's chocolates were created during World War II as a sweet treat for the military away from home. Consumers tend to shy away from candy that melts during the summer heat.

**ACTIVATION:** Mars pledged to send one SKU to the troops for each one purchased at Walmart. A total of 1,816,828 pounds of chocolate was donated. The campaign included in-store signage, retailtainment events and digital activity on Walmart.com.