



Flavor Bites: Flavor Companies—Finding the Right Fit

Large or small: which is best?

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What are the most important factors influencing the career choices of flavorists? While I can only speak for myself, there is a long list of factors to consider, but some of them, such as regulatory expertise, are inextricably linked to the size and breadth of a company's business. For me, 10 factors stand out as the most important considerations motivating me early in my career. They were, in descending order:

1. Learning the fundamentals to enable me to succeed
2. The creative freedom to follow my ideas (however wacky they might seem)
3. The ability to create sales by working directly with customers' technical staff
4. The buzz of seeing your creations on the supermarket shelves
5. A close relationship with operations, ensuring that customers actually received their orders on time
6. Having the support of a productive, inventive and accessible research function
7. Working in an entrepreneurial and adaptable organization
8. Financial reward (I assume readers were all waiting to see where that would feature)
9. The opportunity to travel and work in different markets
10. A close working relationship with perfumers

Not much has changed in my priorities; perhaps financial reward



has crept up the list a little, but continuing to learn is still the greatest pleasure. I suspect many flavorists have similar motivations, and it is interesting to consider whether these criteria are better served by a large flavor company or a small organization. For most flavorists these are the only viable choices because core listings by key accounts have made industry consolidation a priority in recent years. Many midsize flavor companies have disappeared.

Learning the Fundamentals

Large companies would appear to have a clear advantage. They usually need to cover the full range of flavor types in order to provide the breadth of service required by the major global accounts. Small companies often concentrate on a niche market, where they can provide a competitive advantage. Only large companies can afford a comprehensive and fairly academic research and development function and, in a good company, the

fruits of this research should be learning that is freely available to flavorists.

In practice, the choice is not quite this clear cut. The formal training that most large companies once took pride in has been cut by many, because it is always the easiest target in times of stress. On the other side of the equation, small companies always provide trainee flavorists with exposure to every aspect of the company, something that is entirely lacking in large bureaucracies.

Creative Freedom

Here the small company often has the advantage. Large companies often split their creative resource by category or function and rarely put creative or sales in the driving seat. This inevitably imposes a degree of uniformity on the process of creating flavors and a significant loss of freedom. Raw material lists are much easier to manage in small companies and flavorists will be closely aligned to the purchasing and manufacturing functions.

Working with Customers

Here again the small company has the edge, and it can be a considerable one. In a small and informal organization, flavorists naturally work with customers and the process generally works as an efficient small team endeavor. Large companies suffer from much more politicizing, and many functions feel the need to justify their existence by being involved in every politically important project. This can leave flavorists struggling to have a common sense relationship with the customer.

Pride in Success

The large company has an edge here because the glow associated with a win in a famous global brand is quite a few degrees warmer than the glow from winning in a brand that nobody has heard of.

Working with Operations

This category is a hands-down win for the small company. Most successful small companies pride themselves on their superb customer service, and this is always driven by a symbiotic relationship between creative, purchasing, sales and operations.

Working with Research

Small companies cannot invest significant dollars in research, and so the largest companies have a big intrinsic advantage. That advantage can be

tempered by academic complacency in the research areas of some large companies—it is always interesting to ask exactly what percentage of sales have been generated principally as a result of research carried out over the past 10 years.

An Entrepreneurial Organization

The commercial world is now changing so rapidly that large companies have a significant disadvantage. Many of the changes that they should sensibly make are regarded as dangerous and highly disruptive internally, and are very difficult to impose. Small companies have a considerable advantage.

Financial Reward

This category is a clear win for the largest companies. All large companies do not necessarily pay well, and some may substitute job security for pay, but most pay significantly better than their smaller competitors. This results in a higher perceived status for flavorists in large companies. The logic behind this difference is clear—a flavorist working on multimillion-dollar briefs is going to generate more profit than a flavorist working on briefs worth a fraction of that sum.

Vacation Planning

Here again we have a clear win for the large companies. They will have

the global infrastructure and will be working with customers who take a similarly global approach. In any large company there will always be regions that are underperforming and that constantly generate exciting travel and learning opportunities for good flavorists.

What Did Perfumers Ever Do for Us?

Quite a lot actually. This is a significant advantage for flavorists working in a large company. Perfumers value contact and the exchange of ideas with flavorists, and both sides can learn a lot from the other side's intriguingly different approach. This can give large companies a real advantage, if only they can understand how to get over their structural inhibitions.

Conclusion

From my personal list I have attempted to allot scores to large and small companies. The result is very close to a dead heat—the large companies came out ahead, but by the smallest of margins. This assessment has been purely from the point of view of flavorists, but in reality customers' interests are quite similar (with the sad exception of financial reward).

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