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Retail Report

With Costco thirsty for her drink, Bellevue CEO sees big things for Sea2O

By [Melissa Allison](#) and [Amy Martinez](#)
Seattle Times business reporters

A Bellevue company that sells organic energy drinks might see its sales grow more than sevenfold through new contracts with international distributors and Costco.



[enlarge](#) KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES
Nancy Yi, chief executive of Sea2O, touts the health value of seaweed, a key ingredient in her energy beverages.

Sea2O, the name of the company and the product, is at about a dozen retailers, including four Seattle-area Whole Foods [stores.Costco.com](#) will begin selling the drinks next month, and Sea2O officials hope Costco's stores will take the product, too, after a limited run sold out last year.

The 10.5-ounce cans retail for \$2 to \$3. Prices for 12- and 24-packs are being worked out.

The company's CEO is Nancy Yi, who sold her New York spa business in 2001 to sell anti-aging and weight-loss supplements.

Yi moved into energy drinks in 2006 after trying to sell Sea2O as a low-calorie energy drink for women. She reformulated it after learning an organic product with a natural sweetener would be more popular.

She estimates 2008 sales could soar to \$7 million, from less than \$1 million last year.

Yi still co-owns Lotte Beauty Salon in the Washington State Convention & Trade Center and sells supplements through a company called BioSea, but she is focused on the energy-drink business now.

Yi touts the value of seaweed — the "sea" in Sea2O — as a health-savvy ingredient popular in Asia, including her home country of South Korea.

Sea2O is marketed to women, especially mothers looking for a healthful option to caffeine- and sugar-laden energy drinks. Retail sales of energy drinks reached \$3.2 billion in 2006, up 519 percent from 2001, according to Mintel, a Chicago market-research firm.

For moms: No caffeine. Certified organic. Fiber, vitamins B6 and C and seaweed extract.

For kids: Energy-drink cachet, a citrus, tropical-punch flavor and agave, a natural sweetener.

"We're not stimulants; we're food," said Executive Vice President Kent Lindor.

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Yi's fiance, Michael Sprowles, is in charge of exporting Sea2O and is on a tear.

He met Yi at a trade show in Guangzhou, China, last year and has since signed contracts with distributors in his native Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. A contract in Canada is expected shortly.

Sprowles and two partners formed a company to import Sea2O in Australia and New Zealand, where they're marketing the drink to hospitals and schools.

A much larger market is the U.K., Sprowles said, where Sea2O will be distributed by a British

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motorcycle-racing team.

Sea2O's marketing and sales team works in Bellevue, but the drinks are canned in North Carolina.

— **Melissa Allison**

Tidbits

Nau, a Portland clothing company, will open a second Seattle-area store in late spring in Fremont as part of an aggressive expansion that calls for 10 new retail locations this year. Nau also plans to open in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, Boston and Bethesda, Md. It already has a store at Bellevue Square. — *AM*

Earth Class Mail, which scans postal mail and delivers it over the Internet, has opened a store in Seattle at 93 S. Jackson St., the first of five this year. Seattle-based Earth Class plans additional stores in New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., by the third quarter. Customers can have their packages delivered to the stores and held for pickup, said marketing manager Jessica Grimes. The 75-employee firm also has a mail-processing center in Portland. — *AM*

Redhook Ale Brewery CEO Paul Shipman will be paid at least \$90,000 a year to consult with the company after it merges later this year with Widmer Brothers Brewing in Portland. If Redhook uses his services for more than 180 days during the first year, he will be paid an additional \$500 a day. Shipman will be available as a consultant for three more years at a rate of \$500 a day. After the first year, he will receive severance of \$267,800.16 a year for two years, according to a securities filing this week. — *MA*

New York Cupcakes recently closed in downtown Seattle at Westlake Plaza but says it will post relocation data later at its Web site, www.newyorkcupcakes.com. New York Cupcakes still has a store at Bellevue Square, where it has been for about three years. — *MA*

If you dine at Campagne, Dahlia Lounge or more than a dozen other Seattle restaurants from March 16 through 22, you will be able to donate a dollar to UNICEF for the tap water on your table. The Tap Project started in New York last year, where it raised more than \$100,000 in one day, and is now a weeklong national campaign. Donations go to UNICEF's programs to improve access to safe water and sanitation facilities around the world. A list of participating restaurants is at www.tapproject.org. — *MA*

Mu.shoe founder Susan Wilson will open a shoe store Feb. 29 at Main Street and Park Lane in Kirkland. Wilson, formerly the property manager of Kirkland's Park Place Mall, also has a Mu.shoe store in Edmonds. — *AM*

Retail Report appears Fridays. Melissa Allison covers the food and beverage industry. She can be reached at 206-464-3312 or mallison@seattletimes.com. Amy Martinez covers goods, services and online retail. She can be reached at 206-464-2923 or amartinez@seattletimes.com

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