



## Finding a Better Way to Bee

A gourmet food business finds itself in a mid-life crisis, faced with pausing production to reinvent their brand and processes to support future growth.

Any business has growing pains and for husband and wife duo Krista and Steve Aspinwall, those pains became acutely obvious all at once. By bootstrapping their honey butter business for six years, they reached a sought-after threshold in the marketplace with product in 120-150 stores. That's when their two-person operation maxed out. To keep going, they needed to address inefficiencies in process and inconsistencies in branding.

Eight Moon™ came to the table to help Velvet Bees prioritize every item on their plate. An overall brand redesign was recommended after a review of Velvet Bees' current situation and upcoming growth plans. It was apparent that they couldn't afford to think short-term fix.

### A BRAND IS BORN

Velvet Bees Honey Butter, currently the only product of KASA Family Foods, has a simple list of ingredients: honey, butter, cream, sugar and vanilla. It heralded from an old church cookbook in a northern Minnesota town, uncovered by Krista's aunt. Krista's mom had been making it for her friends and said to Krista, "I think this can be something great."

Krista took those words to heart and she, along with her husband, Steve, put their entrepreneurial efforts into this sweet, simple and natural-ingredient recipe. For both of them, their honey butter business has been a labor of love and their full time job since 2011.

The couple had started recognizing the benefits of their involvement and hard work, but felt the pressure of just not being able to give much more. Their honey butter, now was being distributed regionally from Minnesota to Texas in higher-end grocery stores including Kowalskis, Lunds & Byerlys and Whole Foods and was getting some buzz from local foodies. It was apparent they'd reached the maximum output their current system would allow. To move forward, they needed to rethink their production process and envision their future.

"The Eight Moon™ team helped us pull back and look at the larger picture. They helped us see process and branding course corrections we had the opportunity to make now that would allow us to be in a much better place moving forward."

– Krista Aspinwall



Eight Moon™ worked closely with Krista and Steve to retain the essence of their brand while refreshing it to attract new and larger audiences at the national level. The new brand has that nod to their origins but also projects an image that Velvet Bees Honey Butter is growing.

## A BRAND BREAKTHROUGH

"It really was the label that was the tipping point in our call to Eight Moon™," noted Krista. The original label wasn't designed for large-scale production and was becoming logistically impossible. Besides making the product by hand, they were also applying the labels and hand securing the two-piece Mason jar lids.

"The inefficiencies of adhering a rectangular label to a tapered jar and homemade paper circle insert were obvious quick fixes we sought to address," said Krista. "But the Eight Moon™ team helped us pull back and look at the larger picture. They helped us see that developing an overall brand foundation now would allow us to be in a much better place moving forward."

"We've been down this path many times," noted Eight Moon™ owner, Megan Junius. "A business challenge comes to light and the most natural, surface-level solution is to start by taking the path of least resistance to solve it. As designers, we dig deeper. And in a deeper exploration with Velvet Bees, we arrived at a more beneficial path for the longevity of the business: a brand redesign."

The Velvet Bees original brand and label was described as cutesy for craft-fair audiences. Keeping the bee was a must, but the rest of the design – colors, flowers and beelines – were up for grabs. "As silly as it sounds, it was an emotional exercise to relinquish my napkin-doodle design of the original logo and brand," said Krista.

"For brand owners, their original design evokes an emotional response," said Junius, "We worked closely with Krista and Steve to retain the essence of their brand while refreshing it to attract new and larger audiences at the national level." The new brand has that nod to their origins but also projects an image that Velvet Bees Honey Butter is larger than it is. "It needs to look the part when it's being sold for almost \$10 a jar next to fancy cheeses." added Junius.

"When Krista saw the two distinct directions included in the first round of creative, it was joy and relief," John Horner, the agency's New Business & Client Relations shared. "Like any entrepreneur may be when it comes to their brand, she was married to every aspect of their design. She couldn't imagine anyone possibly improving on it. When they shared the new designs with family and friends, the reaction was the same, 'you're ready for the big time now!'"

Examining the jar shape, the lid and the label application process was all part of the creative work. The brand story and overall messaging was also developed. But most importantly, the redesign also included how to incorporate the brand into new flavors and sizes, even a multi-pack gift set and various promotional items. "The creative work was more than just redesigning a label – a foundation from which they can use for future growth was developed. This was really just the beginning," Junius added.

## A BRAND GROWS

The duo invested wisely and their business is quickly turning to gold. Velvet Bees Honey Butter is in talks with distributors that would bring the honey butter to both coasts. In anticipation of this national distribution, they have moved from a shared commercial kitchen, which limited production, to their new space in the NE Food District in Minneapolis. Their new commercial kitchen comes with cold storage, a loading dock, and more packaging automation – so more time can be spend making those jars of golden deliciousness.

## AMERICAN PACKAGE DESIGN AWARD WINNER



Velvet Bees Honey Butter is featured in GD USA's April 2018 issue. The award showcases outstanding work from 200 elite creative firms, agencies and in-house departments. More than 2,000 entries were submitted and only the top 15% were selected.