

MARKETING AUDIT

Stars + Honey

A VMG Partners Portfolio Company

Brianna —

You've got 40+ brands in the portfolio. I picked one that looked interesting and did the work. Here's how I'd help.

Imagine this across the whole portfolio.

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1. What I See

All publicly available sources. No internal data.

The Habit Gap

Stars + Honey has product excellence and a beautiful brand world. 15g of protein, 2g of sugar, collagen peptides, free from gluten, dairy, soy, and seed oils. The visual identity is genuinely strong — design-forward, indulgent-clean, reads more like a wellness brand on a shelf than a sports nutrition product. And the repurchase rate is the proof the product is working: customers buy again at 80%. The habit forms — once a customer is in.

The problem is that the marketing isn't designed to put customers in. It's designed to make them curious.

Stars + Honey is structured like a *discovery* brand. Variety packs are merchandised first. The PDP grid is titled "Expand Your Palate." Limited editions and drops imply scarcity. Flavor copy reads like sommelier notes — "bittersweet elation," "a refined harmony of tart cherry, velvety chocolate, and the delicate crunch of golden waffle cone." The implicit invitation is *come taste something new*. That's a strong invitation for the curious buyer — but the curious buyer isn't the buyer the economics need.

Premium-priced bars don't make money on one-time purchases. The price point only works when the buyer isn't deciding each time — when Stars + Honey is in the cart because Stars + Honey is always in the cart. RXBar, Quest, Larabar — none of them sell on novelty. They sell on automaticity. Their customers don't taste; they reorder.

The 80% repurchase rate says the habit can form. The marketing isn't currently doing the work to form it deliberately. That's the gap.

Channel Execution

- **Homepage** leads with "Flavor you can feel." It's positioning, not invitation. The hero doesn't tell the buyer when to eat the bar, with what, or as part of what routine.
- **Product copy** is poetic, not behavioral. The Espresso Vanilla Cinnamon PDP says *"Hello cappuccino. Awaken and energize with espresso, sweet vanilla, and just the right mix of intriguing spices."* That gestures at morning. It doesn't anchor a habit.
- **Site architecture** prioritizes try over buy-again. Variety sets are the merchandising lead. The reorder path isn't load-bearing on the homepage. The implied buyer journey is sample-and-decide, not lock-in-and-repeat.
- **Instagram** is mood-led and lifestyle-adjacent — beautiful imagery, but not occasion-locked and not habit-locked. A scroller can't deduce when this bar belongs in their day from the feed, and they can't see a version of themselves in it. There's no *this is me* moment to attach to.
- **Reviews** are quietly telling the story the brand isn't telling. *"I'd eat this every day."* *"First protein bar I don't get sick of."* *"We ate the entire box in the first week."* Buyers are reporting habit behavior unprompted. The marketing should be asking them to lock it in.

Competitive Reality

Every winning bar is someone's habit. RXBar is the midday-hunger habit — the bar you grab when lunch slipped. Quest is the post-workout habit — the bar that lives in your gym bag. Larabar is the trail-and-snack habit. Magic Spoon is the breakfast-cereal-without-the-guilt habit. None of these brands lead with a flavor. They lead with a moment in the day so reliable that the buyer doesn't think about the bar — they think about the moment, and the bar comes with it.

Stars + Honey sits in a fourth quadrant: premium-priced, beauty-coded, design-forward, no claimed habit. That's the hardest position in the category. Without a habit, the buyer has to actively justify the premium price every time. With a habit, the price justifies itself. People don't price-shop their morning coffee. They price-shop a bar they're not sure they'll like.

The morning coffee daypart is open. It's the largest, most automatic daily ritual most American adults have. But habits don't form from generic suggestions — they form when the buyer can see a version of themselves doing the thing and decides, *that's me*. The pairing is the mechanism: a specific, repeatable picture of the bar and the cup, with a person in the frame the buyer recognizes — the founder with an espresso before email, the new mom with a cold brew at the kitchen counter, the late-twenties professional walking to the café before standup. If Stars + Honey becomes the bar that goes with my coffee — the way a croissant goes with an espresso, the way peanut butter goes with apple slices — the brand doesn't have to justify the price every time. It just has to be there, every morning, next to the cup that's already there.

The gap: Stars + Honey has the product, the brand, and the proof that the habit forms once a customer is in. The marketing recruits the curious buyer, not the regular. The work is to redirect the front of the funnel toward habit recruitment — to give a specific kind of buyer a picture of themselves with Stars + Honey and their morning coffee, often enough that the pairing stops being suggested and starts being assumed.

2. What I'd Test First

Three experiments, first 30 days.

Experiment 1: Morning Coffee PDP + Ritual Creative

Observation	The bestseller PDP (Cacao Salt Caramel Peanut) does strong product work but no habit work. It names flavor, ingredients, and nutrition. It doesn't name a pairing, a ritual, or a buyer. The Meta creative pointing to it is mood-led, not behaviorally anchored — no recognizable morning, no recognizable person in the frame. The buyer who lands on the page sees the bar. They don't see themselves with it.
Hypothesis	Rebuilding the bestseller PDP to anchor the bar inside a specific morning — pairing notes, archetype-driven imagery, ritual copy — supported by paid creative previewing the same picture, will lift subscription-vs-single-pack conversion, raise time-on-page, and improve 60-day repurchase. Ad and PDP do the same job in sequence: hand the buyer a <i>this is me</i> moment, twice.
Test Design	Rebuild the Cacao Salt Caramel Peanut PDP with pairing notes (drink, ritual cue, archetype), new imagery, and habit-oriented copy. Run 4–6 archetype-driven ad variants on Meta and Instagram, each featuring Stars + Honey + a coffee + a recognizable buyer-and-setting ("the founder's espresso before email," "the late-twenties professional's cortado before standup"). CTA routes specifically to the rebuilt PDP. Split against the current PDP + current creative on equal spend. Measure CTR, CPA, time-on-page, add-to-cart rate, subscription %, and 60-day repurchase by cohort.
Success Metric	Higher CTR on at least 2 archetypes. Equal or lower CPA. Measurably higher subscription-conversion rate and 60-day repurchase in the treatment cohort. Proves the depth play on a known winner before the same treatment scales across the catalog.
Time & Resources	3–4 weeks. Ad account access, Shopify PDP access (single SKU rebuild), creative production (one targeted shoot or composite), GA4 and Klaviyo for cohort tracking.

Live version: <https://joekim.info/for/stars-and-honey/cacao-salt-caramel-peanut>

Experiment 2: After-Dinner PDP + Dessert Ritual Creative

Observation	The current Cherry Chocolate Waffle Cone PDP names flavor and ingredients but doesn't claim an occasion. The reviews are telling the story the page isn't — buyers explicitly call it " <i>instead of ice cream,</i> " a substitution behavior that's already happening, just unprompted. Current Meta creative isn't anchored to the after-dinner moment at all — no bowl, no spoon, no evening in the frame. The brand has a second recurring daypart it isn't claiming.
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Hypothesis	Rebuilding the CCWC PDP to anchor the bar inside the after-dinner sweet tooth — pairing notes for the bowl-and-spoon ritual, archetype-driven imagery, substitution-led copy — supported by paid creative previewing the same picture (the 9pm parent, the late-night writer, the post-restaurant guest), will recruit a second habit segment outside the morning-coffee cohort. The play is the same as Experiment 1: same architecture, different daypart. Two anchored occasions prove the playbook isn't a one-flavor trick.
Test Design	Rebuild the Cherry Chocolate Waffle Cone PDP with after-dinner pairing notes, archetype carousel, and substitution-led copy. Run 3–4 archetype-driven ad variants on Meta and Instagram — the 9pm parent, the late-night writer, the post-restaurant guest — each featuring CCWC + a bowl + an evening setting. CTA routes specifically to the rebuilt CCWC PDP. Run in parallel with Experiment 1 on a separate creative cohort. Measure CTR, CPA, time-on-page, subscription %, 60-day repurchase. Cross-check cohort behavior against the morning-coffee cohort — are these distinct buyers, or the same buyer pulled into a second occasion?
Success Metric	After-dinner CPA at parity or better with the morning-coffee archetype. Measurably higher subscription-conversion rate and 60-day repurchase vs. current CCWC PDP + current creative. Cohort analysis reveals whether the two occasions reach distinct audiences (broader funnel) or overlap on the same buyer (deeper basket per customer).
Time & Resources	3–4 weeks. Ad account access, Shopify PDP access (single SKU rebuild), creative production (one evening-themed shoot or composite), GA4 and Klaviyo for cohort tracking by occasion.

Live version: <https://joekim.info/for/stars-and-honey/cherry-chocolate-waffle-cone>

Experiment 3: Find My Pairing

Observation	Stars + Honey has 11 active flavors plus rotating limited editions. Buyers who don't already have a favorite face an 11-flavor decision tree with no guide. The variety set is the brand's current answer, but a variety set is a discovery answer, not a habit answer — it hands the buyer the work of figuring out which flavor fits which morning, and most buyers don't do the work. The brand never gets to put the <i>this is me</i> picture in front of the buyer because the buyer never tells the brand who they are.
Hypothesis	A short questionnaire — drink, morning mood, time available, flavor lean — that returns a single flavor + a specific pairing + a ritual cue converts higher than the variety-set entry point, builds first-party data on the buyer's morning archetype, and produces a result the buyer can picture themselves enjoying. The output isn't a SKU. It's a routine the buyer recognizes as theirs. Paid creative routes the unconverted directly into the matcher, where the moment of self-recognition is built

	by the buyer's own answers.
Test Design	4–5 question matcher hosted on the site. Inputs: morning drink, mood (rushed / slow / focused / social), time available, flavor lean (sweet / chocolate / nutty / fruit). Output: one flavor + one drink pairing + one ritual cue ("Save it for the slow Sunday espresso") + a subscription CTA. Run a parallel paid creative variant with a "Find the bar for your morning" CTA driving directly into the matcher. Split against current variety-set landing on equal spend. Measure CTR, completion rate, subscription %, AOV, and 60-day repurchase by cohort.
Success Metric	Matcher cohort shows higher subscription % and higher 60-day repurchase than variety-set cohort. Completion rate above 50%. First-party data on morning archetype is structured cleanly enough to feed paid and email segmentation within 30 days.
Time & Resources	2–3 weeks. Web build (lightweight, ships on the existing stack), ad account access, Klaviyo for cohort tagging, GA4 for funnel measurement.

Live version: <https://joekim.info/for/stars-and-honey/find-my-pairing>

Three experiments, one thesis: the *this is me* moment, executed three ways. Experiment 1 builds depth on the bestseller — proves the morning-coffee anchor lifts subscription and repurchase on a SKU the brand already trusts. Experiment 2 ports the same architecture to a second daypart — proves the playbook isn't a one-occasion trick and opens a different price-comparison set. Experiment 3 builds breadth at the front of the funnel — the matcher recruits buyers who don't have a flavor yet and locks them into one through self-identification. Together they cover the three highest-leverage paths the current funnel doesn't serve: deepening the winner, claiming a second occasion, and converting the undecided.

3. What I Already Built

Three prototypes hosted at joekim.info/for/stars-and-honey, each a working answer to the habit thesis. The Cacao Salt Caramel Peanut rebuild claims the morning coffee occasion. The Cherry Chocolate Waffle Cone rebuild claims after-dinner — the same playbook executed against a second daily ritual. Find My Pairing is the scaled version: a four-question matcher that hands any unsure buyer their flavor and their routine.

Deliverable 1: Cacao Salt Caramel Peanut — Morning Coffee PDP

The bestselling PDP, rebuilt around the morning coffee pairing. Same product, same brand, same visual system — re-architected to recruit the regular instead of the taster.

What changes

- **Hero:** bar + a cup of espresso or cortado, with a person in the frame mid-morning. The image gives the buyer a picture they can place themselves inside.
- **Above-fold copy:** pairing notes, sommelier-style but tight. *"Pairs with: espresso, cortado, dark roast. Best for: the rushed morning before email."*
- **Archetype module:** short portraits anchoring the bar to specific mornings — the founder's espresso before email, the new mom's cold brew at the kitchen counter, the professional's walk-up cortado before standup.
- **Reviews:** routine-anchored quotes surface first. *"I have one every morning with my coffee"* leads; generic flavor praise follows.
- **CTA architecture:** subscription is the default, single-pack the secondary option.

Why it works

- **The bar appears inside a morning the buyer recognizes.** Every element on the page does the same job — anchor the product to a routine the buyer can see themselves in. The PDP stops selling a flavor and starts selling a habit.
- **Subscription is the default.** Reordering the CTA hierarchy reframes the buying decision from "should I try this?" to "should I have this every week?" — the right frame for a premium-priced product.
- **The page becomes a template.** Once Cacao Salt Caramel Peanut is proven, the same treatment scales across the catalog. Each flavor gets its own anchored morning, its own archetype, its own pairing.
- **First-party data accrues.** Which archetype gets clicked, which pairing CTA gets taken, which review converts — every interaction is a signal about which morning the buyer recognizes themselves in.
- **The existing brand identity does the visual heavy lifting.** The visual system stays intact. The changes are habit-oriented, not aesthetic. The brand world doesn't get redesigned — it gets pointed at a moment.

Live version: <https://joekim.info/for/stars-and-honey/cacao-salt-caramel-peanut>

Deliverable 2: Cherry Chocolate Waffle Cone — After-Dinner PDP

The same architecture as the CSCP rebuild, ported to a different daily ritual: the 9pm sweet tooth. Shows what the playbook looks like when applied to an occasion outside morning coffee — same brand world, same restraint, different moment.

What changes

- **Hero:** bar broken into a bowl, spoon, evening lighting. Headline: *"Dessert in a bar."*
- **Above-fold copy:** pairing notes anchored to the dessert ritual. *"Pairs with: a small bowl, a spoon, decaf or red wine. Best for: 9:08pm. Kids down, show on, freezer making promises it shouldn't keep."*
- **Archetype module:** after-dinner portraits — the 9pm parent, the late-night writer, the post-restaurant guest.
- **Reviews:** *"I eat this instead of ice cream now"* leads. The substitution is the story the page is selling.
- **CTA architecture:** subscription-first, framed as "Make it the bar after dinner."

Why it works

- **Proves the template ports.** Morning coffee was the canonical occasion. After-dinner shows the same architecture works for any consistent daily ritual the brand chooses to claim. Two anchored flavors prove the playbook.
- **Opens a different comparison set.** A bar that replaces ice cream is competing with a \$7 pint, not a \$4 protein bar. The frame moves the price comparison up. Premium pricing makes sense against a different category, not the same one.
- **The buying math expands.** With more than one habit-anchored flavor in the catalog, the average buyer has more reasons to add Stars + Honey to their week. The catalog stops behaving like a discovery rack and starts behaving like a habit set.
- **The reviews already do the work.** *"I eat this instead of ice cream"* is a recurring review pattern the existing PDP doesn't surface. Surfacing it tells the page's own story back to the next buyer.
- **Same brand identity, different moment.** The visual system stays intact. Same restraint, same typography. Only the daypart changes.

Live version: <https://joekim.info/for/stars-and-honey/cherry-chocolate-waffle-cone>

Deliverable 3: Find My Pairing

A short interactive that asks the buyer about their morning and returns a flavor + pairing + ritual cue. The job isn't to recommend a SKU. It's to give the unsure buyer a *this is me* moment, generated from their own answers.

The flow

- *What's in your cup most mornings?* (espresso / cortado / americano / cold brew / black coffee / matcha)
- *What's your morning like?* (rushed / slow / focused / social)
- *How much time do you have?* (5 minutes / 15 minutes / a slow hour)

- *Flavor lean?* (sweet / chocolate / nutty / fruit / something different)

Output: one flavor + one drink pairing + one ritual cue. Example: *"Espresso Vanilla Cinnamon — save this one for the slow Sunday espresso. The cinnamon doubles down on the spice in a dark roast."* Subscription CTA inline.

Why it works

- **The buyer tells the brand who they are.** Every other entry point asks the buyer to figure it out. The matcher inverts that. Four questions in, the brand knows the buyer's morning archetype — and the buyer knows what their Stars + Honey routine looks like.
- **The output is a routine, not a SKU.** A flavor recommendation alone is interchangeable. A flavor + drink + ritual cue is a habit the buyer can repeat tomorrow.
- **First-party data is rich and structured.** Each completion produces a tagged profile — drink, archetype, flavor lean. That data feeds paid segmentation, email lifecycle, and creative briefs within weeks, not quarters.
- **AOV increases naturally.** Paired recommendations convert at higher AOV than single-product PDPs — but only when the pairing is credible. The buyer's own inputs make this one credible.
- **It works across the entire catalog.** Every flavor has a buyer; the matcher just finds them. Limited editions slot in cleanly. Rotating drops get instant placement in the right archetype.

Live version: <https://joekim.info/for/stars-and-honey/find-my-pairing>

Execution: Week 1: ship the CSCP and CCWC PDPs, Find My Pairing v1. Weeks 2–3: launch archetype-driven paid creative routing to all three surfaces; capture cohort data by occasion. Week 4: read results, refine, decide which surface and which archetype get the next investment cycle.

4. Questions I'd Ask

Question	What I'm Thinking
<p>The 80% repurchase rate is strong by category standards. What does it look like cohort by cohort? My hypothesis is that the headline could be hiding a bimodal distribution — a small core of monthly buyers vs. a larger group that lapses after one or two reorders. The shape tells me whether the habit is forming broadly, or whether the brand is being kept aloft by a small loyal cohort.</p>	<p><i>I'm probing whether a strong headline number is structurally durable.</i></p>
<p>Subscription vs. one-time purchase mix? Subscription is the structural correlate of habit. If most of the repurchase is one-time reorders, the brand is doing the work of habit recruitment without capturing the structural commitment that protects it. If most is subscription, the foundation is already there and the work is to move more buyers onto it.</p>	<p><i>I'm thinking about the structural surrogate for habit, not the marketing for it.</i></p>
<p>Variety-pack vs. single-flavor buyer LTV? The variety pack is the merchandised entry point, but I'd bet single-flavor buyers — the ones who picked a favorite and stuck — show meaningfully higher LTV. If that's true, every variety-pack acquisition should be optimized to convert into a single-flavor commitment within 60 days. If it's not, the catalog strategy reshapes around the variety buyer.</p>	<p><i>I'm thinking about how the product entry point shapes downstream LTV. A CMO question, not a merchandising one.</i></p>
<p>The brand has a public Wholesale page and active retail distribution. What's the DTC vs. wholesale mix today, and how does buyer behavior differ between the two? The wholesale buyer's acquisition story is different — they picked up Stars + Honey because they saw it on a shelf, not because they saw an ad. Has the brand mapped which channel produces stickier customers, and is marketing currently weighted toward the channel that produces the better long-term buyer?</p>	<p><i>I'm thinking about channel-level LTV, not blended.</i></p>
<p>The current Meta creative is mood-led and lifestyle-adjacent. Has occasion-anchored creative — bar + cup + recognizable buyer — ever been tested against it head-to-head? My read is that it hasn't, and that's a deliberate brand aesthetic call rather than a performance call. I'd want to pressure-test the assumption with a clean A/B before scaling either approach.</p>	<p><i>I've read the ad library and have a specific hypothesis to test.</i></p>
<p>Limited editions like Peanut Butter Mousse and Mint Cookies and Cream imply a drop strategy. What's the lift on drops, and what's the cannibalization rate against core SKUs? If the LE is recruiting new buyers who then convert to core, drops are an acquisition engine. If existing core</p>	<p><i>I'm probing whether a brand-feeling tactic is actually a customer-acquisition tactic.</i></p>

Question	What I'm Thinking
buyers are substituting their next core purchase for the LE, drops are a margin hit dressed up as a brand moment.	

5. What This Unlocks

Everything above is from public data. It tells me where to look. Access tells me what it's costing.

With Klaviyo, Shopify, ad accounts, GA4, and the subscription stack, I'd ship the CSCP and CCWC PDPs and Find My Pairing v1 as live conversion experiments, and run archetype-driven creative against current creative on equal spend across both occasions. The first 30 days produce a clear answer to the question the current marketing isn't designed to answer — whether the marketing is buying acquisition or habit. If even one archetype shows a 15–20% lift in subscription conversion or 60-day repurchase, the same treatment scales to the next flavor and the next occasion within a quarter.

Stars + Honey is one of 40+ brands in the VMG portfolio. Most early-stage CPG companies hit the same pattern: strong product, distinctive brand, real proof of repurchase — but a marketing surface built for discovery instead of habit. A fractional CMO who can apply this kind of analysis across the portfolio — quickly, repeatedly, without a full-time hire — is a force multiplier for the fund.

Next Steps

Let's talk about how this scales across the VMG portfolio.

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