

A Purveyor of Flavor

An Interview with J.R. Rigley, President, The Watkins Co.

EDITORS' NOTE *With more than 25 years of experience in the consumer packaged goods space, J.R. Rigley has been President of The Watkins Co. since 2013. Rigley joined the company in 2005 as Vice President of Sales and Marketing and was promoted to Executive Vice President in 2008. He had previously been with spice and flavoring company, McCormick & Company, after launching his career with Procter & Gamble. During his decades in consumer goods, Rigley has developed extensive expertise in many business disciplines including operations, manufacturing, retail, sales, business strategy, team building, product marketing, HR, and leadership. He received a BS in economics from Towson University and an MBA from Johns Hopkins University.*



J.R. Rigley

COMPANY BRIEF *From the bluffs high above the Mississippi River in Winona, Minnesota, comes the purity of The Watkins Co. (watkins1868.com). For over 150 years, Watkins has been heralded as purveyors of flavor, with an unwavering commitment to crafting award-winning gourmet flavoring products from high-quality, natural ingredients, without the use of artificial flavors and colors, GMOs, corn syrup or gluten.*

Will you highlight the history and heritage of Watkins?

In 1868, J.R. Watkins and his horse and buggy brought products directly to his midwestern neighbors, which is when The Watkins Company was born. As early as 1895, flavoring items, including vanilla extract, black pepper, and cinnamon, were introduced to the product lineup.

Today, Watkins is known as a purveyor of flavor – we are truly experts and have a 154-year legacy to back that up. Built on quality and authenticity, our legacy remains strong, evident by the fact that across several categories, from spices to extracts, Watkins is one of today's fastest-growing brands.

We also take incredible pride in our home state of Minnesota. We continue to manufacture here and hold some of the industry's most rigorous quality standards to provide consumers with an unmistakably premium Watkins experience.

What have been the keys to Watkins' longevity and ability to remain relevant for over 150 years?

It's simple – we stay focused on our consumer's needs. We pivot and adapt quickly to changes in consumption habits and are well-positioned to leverage emerging trends that come with new generations entering the kitchen. With each unique flavoring or spice, we want our latest generation of cooks to trust Watkins in their favorite recipes just as their great-great-grandparents did. And trust is not something

we take lightly. We have spent the past 154 years working to establish trust in a way that is difficult for other brands to match, and it's been something that has resonated exceptionally well for Watkins with both our retail partners and consumers.

Watkins' longevity as a brand can also be attributed to our commitment to quality. For Watkins, quality means leveraging our relationships worldwide to source premium, all-natural ingredients that are free from artificial

flavors and colors. We steer clear of GMOs, corn syrup, and gluten and maintain control of our manufacturing right here in Winona, Minnesota. That quality can be found in every product that bears our name and combined with our history, it's proved to be quite a winning combination.

Will you provide an overview of Watkins' business and product offerings?

Watkins is a leading manufacturer of spices, extracts, and other gourmet flavoring products. Our extensive portfolio consists of products such as our renowned Pure Vanilla Extract and All Natural Original Gourmet Baking Vanilla, a robust selection of organic herbs, spices and blends, baking decorations, and now, for the first time in our history, bitters.

Consumers can purchase our product at their favorite grocers, as well as online. Watkins also serves the food service industry, including national restaurant chains, professional chefs, and bakeries that use larger quantities more applicable to a professional kitchen setting.



A selection of Watkins products

How critical is innovation for Watkins' business and where is innovation taking place in the company?

Innovation is critical in any business, and we are always excited to push the flavor envelope at Watkins. Within our R&D department, you'll find some of the world's most experienced and talented flavor masters. It is here they experiment using spices, herbs, pure oils, and botanicals to create unique blends which are simply unmatched. Our new 1868 Organic Grilling line is an excellent example of what they can create. This completely new line of organic seasonings, rubs, and marinades targets the needs of today's griller.

Perhaps one of the most exciting examples of innovation in our 154-year history was our recent foray into the world of spirits with a new line of bitters. Flavoring is literally ingrained in Watkins' DNA, so breaking into this category was a natural progression for our brand. Building on our rich flavor heritage and being a leader in the gourmet extracts and flavors category, we knew we had the expertise to create a great product, and this is one that many of our consumers have been asking for.

Will you discuss Watkins' commitment to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?

Watkins is intent on full inclusivity with a focus on diversity. We aim to represent our community and work at all levels to create a talented team that provides the best input for the overall direction and success of the company.

What do you see as Watkins' responsibility to the communities it serves and to being force for good in society?



Watkins Organic Grilling Flavoring Products

One of our core values at Watkins is contributing to our communities' overall quality of life. We are always looking for ways to give back in the United States, Canada, and around the world. Watkins currently partners with several charitable organizations, including Feeding America and World Central Kitchen. We make product donations to the Feeding America network of food pantries, food banks, and meal programs, supporting over 40 million people annually. Most

recently, we have partnered with World Central Kitchen to drive awareness around World Food Day and the organization that delivers meals to the front lines of humanitarian, climate, and community crises around the globe.

At Watkins, we also support our employees in their individual efforts to do good in their communities. We encourage our employees to become involved in charities and organizations they are passionate about and offer paid time off for volunteering.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

I believe that effective leadership is centered on a position of empathetic opportunities. This means having a clear understanding of every team member's goals and skill set. The leader's focus is to understand what their employees hope to accomplish and to help them achieve these goals, whether personally or professionally. Clear communication at all levels of the organization is also essential for moving forward, individually and as a company.

What are your priorities for Watkins as you look to the future?

We are thrilled that Watkins is in a high-growth position within our core business. We have spent years strengthening our foundation, including the development of our people. We have the infrastructure for growth, rounding out our product portfolio to meet the needs of our customers and deepening our relationships with our distribution partners. As we continue to grow, we are devoted to increasing and maximizing distribution, improving our capacity abilities, raising consumer awareness, and, most importantly, helping our employees achieve their goals. ●



The Watkins Co. headquarters in Winona, Minnesota