

Big Diet Companies Promote New Ways to Reduce

By ELIZABETH OLSON

DIET season is here, and three well-known bulge-busting companies — Weight Watchers, Nutrisystem and Jenny Craig — have made major changes in their programs for consumers looking to shed weight packed on during the holidays, or before.

The diet purveyors are jockeying for a share of the rich industry, estimated at \$60 billion or more yearly, by ramping up their marketing to showcase new weight-loss approaches like an electronic activity tracker and food upgrades.

And for those who detest counting calories, there may be a shortcut to a svelte figure. The sports apparel makers Fila USA and Reebok International are offering specially engineered body-toning wear that they say makes exercise — and even everyday movement — more efficient, and allows the wearer to look good while doing it.

— For the millions who do embark on diets, Weight Watchers International has a new Points-Plus program, its biggest change in the last dozen years in how calories are counted. Nutrisystem North America has spruced up its packaged meals program by offering fresh-frozen foods. And Jenny Craig introduced a program to allow dieters to monitor calorie intake and physical activity levels, which it says is the biggest innovation in its 25-year history.

The weight loss giants often rely on celebrity dieters to promote their methods. This year, Weight Watchers is mixing it up by telling individual success stories online, but sticking with the celebrity spokeswoman Jennifer Hudson, who, in form-fitting dresses, sings the program's praises, literally, with a redo of the song "Feeling Good."

The company started its new campaign early — the day after Christmas, instead of in January — and broadcast commercials on New Year's Eve countdown TV shows, said Cheryl Callan, its chief marketing officer. Under the new PointsPlus plan, she said, processed foods have higher point values, but fresh fruits and vegetables have no points.

"People tend to drop off their diets," Ms. Callan said, "so we are trying to help them eat real food in a real world."

Weight Watchers spent almost \$117 million on advertising last year, according to figures from

FILA
bodyToning system
SCULPT.TONE.AMAZE.



STYLING: FLO FOLA

Nonprofessional models selected in a casting call are featured in ads for Fila's BodyToning clothing made of Lycra.

Kantar Media. This year, Ms. Callan said, the company, working with the McCann Erickson agency, will increase spending as much as 20 percent on its "It's a new day" campaign, spread across print, television, the Web and social media.

Nutrisystem is remaking itself with new offerings, developed with the advice of professional chefs, that add fresh-frozen foods like Asian-style beef to its choices. The company also lowered its monthly cost to \$299, down \$100 from last year. Nutrisystem will still use the celebrities Marie Osmond and Dan Marino, but its new advertising campaign focuses on ordinary customer stories.

"Customers want to hear from people who use the brand," said Christopher Terrill, Nutrisystem's chief marketing officer. The company, with its new agency, DonatWald & Haque, of Santa Monica, Calif., sent cameras to a range of customers, and their home videos are featured in the company's ads, with the tag line, "Hooray you! New you revolution."

Mr. Terrill says the company plans to reach a wider audience

by increasing its television network presence but not abandoning cable, where it has been a staple. Nutrisystem spent \$297 million on advertising in 2009, according to Kantar. Like Weight Watchers, Nutrisystem declined to disclose dollar details, but Mr. Terrill said spending would increase to push "the sea change in the brand."

Its competitor Jenny Craig, which offers packaged meals, also has relied on weight-dropping celebrities like the actress Valerie Bertinelli to recruit customers. The company will soon announce the celebrity who will appear in ads for its new Metabolic Max program, which combines weight management counseling, menu planning and the BodyMedia FIT armband.

Dieters no longer have to guess whether they are eating too many calories or exercising too little, the company said; they can upload their data and track everything in real time. Steve Bellach, vice president for North American marketing, said Jenny Craig would expand its reach by showing short videos about the new program in gyms, shopping malls and some doctors' offices.

Mr. Bellach said the company, a division of Nestlé, would increase ad spending about 20 percent this year. It spent nearly \$34 million last year on advertising, according to Kantar.

For those seeking a shortcut, Fila offers toning apparel, which it is promoting with a saucy campaign. One ad lists the many names for glutes.

John Mamus, head of Fila's creative agency, Mamus, said the jiggle-reducing wear answers the perennial question about whether one's pants flatter one's backside. The Lycra gear, which the ads promise will "Achieve amazing in half the time," is engineered to compress certain muscles to enhance blood circulation and oxygenation, and add resistance to exercise movements, Fila said.

Fila, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary, is advertising with nonprofessional models selected from a casting call in New York. Those chosen include Andrea Jackson Williams, 34, who works in the finance industry and trains for marathons by running in Central Park.

"The pants suck you in like a vacuum," she said. "And you sweat like crazy. But my thighs got thinner, my legs toned and my glutes tightened."

Fila's rival Reebok introduced its EasyTone apparel in November with its creative agency, DDB, a unit of Omnicom Group, with its "Reewind" campaign. Its EasyTone footwear spot rewinds in the middle to show apparel in the second half. The spot shows how EasyTone shoes help make legs and derrière look great "and how the apparel similarly makes you work a bit harder in the glutes and in the upper body," said John Lynch, who is in charge of United States marketing for Reebok.

The company spent \$23 million in 2009 for its advertising, according to Kantar, and more than doubled its spending in the first half of 2010. That was before the introduction of EasyTone apparel, which is different from its workout wear.

All the programs and apparel could be for naught if an effective weight loss pill comes to market, warned John LaRosa, of Marketdata Enterprises, which is based in Tampa, Fla., and monitors the diet industry.

"People typically flock to such a drug rather than a structured program," he said. "They always want weight loss in a bottle."