

# #8- Simply Gum - Pioneering the Natural Gum Market with Simply

Founder: Caron Proschan



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## Introduction

Caron Proschan, founder and CEO of Simply, created a company that broke new ground in the confectionery market by creating one of the first natural, plastic-free gums. Caron's journey from experimenting in her kitchen to running a manufacturing facility in Brooklyn highlights her determination to disrupt an industry dominated by established players. Through Simply, Caron has brought awareness to the hidden ingredients in everyday products, challenging consumers to think about what they put into their bodies.

## Background and Inspiration

Caron's entrepreneurial journey began after business school and a mid-career decision to pursue her passion for natural products. Though her previous work experience wasn't directly related to food, it equipped her with the tenacity and grit needed to navigate the challenges of starting a business. "Being an entrepreneur, you just have to really have an idea and have the grit to go after it," Caron said. Caron's journey into the food industry did not begin with a passion for cooking but with a dedication to natural products and healthier living. "I realized that there was no natural gum on the market," she recalled. "I started doing research and learned that all gum was made of plastic, and that really horrified me." This revelation inspired Caron to take action and fill a glaring gap in the market with a gum that was both natural and plastic-free.

## From Kitchen Experiments to Full-Scale Manufacturing

Caron's early days were spent in her kitchen, where she began experimenting with ingredients that could replace the plastic base found in most commercial gums. She eventually landed on chicle, a sap from a tree in Central America, as the base for Simply's gum. "I started tinkering in my kitchen, trying to reverse engineer what gum could be made of if it weren't made from plastic," Caron explained.

Scaling from her kitchen experiments to mass production was a major challenge. Lacking a manufacturing background, Caron took a hands-on approach: she moved from her home kitchen to a small incubator space, and then gradually expanded into larger spaces, acquiring equipment and machinery along the way. Today, Simply operates its own manufacturing facility in Brooklyn.

“Very few people make their own product,” Caron noted, highlighting the significance of this achievement in an industry where outsourcing production is the norm.

### Building an Audience and Educating Consumers

From the beginning, Simply targeted consumers who were mindful of what they were putting into their bodies. The natural gum category was an untapped market, and Caron saw an opportunity to appeal to health-conscious individuals who were already seeking better-for-you products in other categories. “Our audience was people who cared about what was going into their bodies,” Caron said.

Simply’s first retail breakthrough came when they landed a spot at a Whole Foods store in New York’s Columbus Circle. “That was the first one that took us,” Caron recalled. The product quickly gained traction, flying off the shelves and validating Caron’s belief that there was strong demand for a natural gum alternative.

### Challenges and Competition

Launching a food product is never without its challenges, and Simply faced its share of hurdles. From securing reliable suppliers of natural ingredients to managing production and persuading retailers to stock their products, every step required persistence. “There’s a ton of challenges launching in the food industry. It has to be unique,” Caron explained. “Getting a reliable supply chain, ensuring excellent product quality, and then getting consumers to buy it off the shelf were all significant hurdles.”

The gum market is highly competitive, dominated by established brands like Wrigley. However, Simply carved out a niche with its unique value proposition of natural, plastic-free gum. “At first, the manufacturing was a major barrier because no one else could make natural gum,” Caron said. As the market evolved, other natural gum manufacturers emerged, but Simply’s early entry and commitment to quality helped it maintain consumer loyalty.

### Expansion Beyond Gum

Caron’s vision for Simply extends beyond gum. The company has already branched into other confections, such as chocolate-covered dates, staying true to its ethos of creating “unusually simple products.” Caron sees Simply as a platform brand that can extend into various food categories. “Simply stands for an unusually simple brand, creating unusually simple products, and that can extend into all kinds of food items,” she said.

### Success Stories and Future Goals

One of Simply’s biggest successes is the establishment of its own manufacturing facility. “Creating our own manufacturing facility was a huge undertaking, and we’ve successfully been able to do that,” Caron said. Simply’s factory has not only enabled the company to maintain control over its production but also created manufacturing jobs in Brooklyn, further solidifying its roots in the local community.

Looking ahead, Caron envisions Simply expanding its product line and reaching more retail doors. “I want Simply to have a number of new products and be in even more retail doors than we’re in now,” she said. She aims to break into conventional grocery channels, convenience stores, and clubs like Costco, expanding the brand’s reach to a broader audience.

## Conclusion

Caron Proschan's Simply has redefined what consumers can expect from gum and other confections, proving that there is a market for natural, simple, and plastic-free alternatives. By taking on the challenge of manufacturing her own products and educating consumers about what goes into everyday items, Caron has not only built a successful business but also sparked a conversation about transparency and health in the food industry. Her journey is a testament to the power of seeing a gap in the market, taking bold steps to fill it, and remaining committed to a vision of better-for-you products. As Caron aptly advises aspiring food entrepreneurs, "Create a product that's super delicious, that people love—because if it's just okay, it's not going to be a big idea."

You can find their products at [simplygum.com](https://www.simplygum.com) or at your local grocery store's checkout!

## Adam's Takeaway

Caron mentioned to me in her interview her strategy of receiving early market feedback on Simply Gum, and that's something that stood out to me. Rather than sitting in the kitchen trying to perfect the recipe, she first took it to the shelves and assessed customer needs, practically letting them decide on the product. This concept of early market feedback has proven to be essential for getting the product off the ground for many of the interviewed companies.