

Science is the key to supplement marketing

10/18/2004 - A report published last week suggested that supplement manufacturers need to win back consumer confidence – shaken by a spate of negative media reports. Norbert Weitkemper, director of global marketing for Cognis Nutrition & Health, told *Philippa Nuttall* what he sees as the challenges ahead for the industry.

A study by Packaged Facts, a publishing division of MarketResearch.com, noted that the supplement market has posted a lackluster compound annual growth rate of 1.8 percent over the past five years, but suggested that sales will pick up if companies opt for concerted marketing campaigns based around ‘safe’ patented ingredients.

Weitkemper too thinks that consumer confidence has been shaken in recent years, but qualifies this by drawing attention to similar problems with prescription drugs.

"Dietary supplements have had their share of controversy, but so have drugs," he told **NutraIngredientsUSA**.

He said that in order to move away from the negative publicity, supplement companies must focus marketing efforts on those products with substantiated claims. He added that the industry as a whole must police *"those few companies that tarnish the reputations for the large majority of companies selling scientifically based products."*

"We must base our marketing campaigns on sound science or we will lose consumer confidence in our products," he said.

Moreover, Weitkemper believed the industry needed to make products easier to understand so that consumers did not feel confused by the choice of supplements facing them and were able to make a rational, intelligent choice based on a real understanding of the products.

"We must take the guesswork out of the equation," he said. *"Consumers don't want to have to figure out what they need, why and how much."*

He also noted that supplements should be tailored to fit the modern customer's needs.

"Consumers, especially aging baby boomers, have made it clear that they want to take charge of their own health — yet that needs to fit with their increasingly busy lifestyles. We must make it convenient for them and provide information they can understand and digest in a short amount of time. We have learned through our market research that consumer choice is lifestyle-driven as opposed to product-driven."

He predicted that as consumers become savvier there will be an even greater demand for high quality natural ingredients as they select those marked as natural over those that are made from synthetic ingredients.

"All-Natural' labeling will give manufacturers a powerful edge in the market," he said.

Weitkemper added that regulatory changes will also present a challenge to the industry in the coming years, though he welcomed the forthcoming introduction of the new GMPs, which he felt would help raise the industry's yardstick by steering business towards quality suppliers.

He thought some of the greatest challenges would come from outside the supplement industry from the turbulent economic climate.

"Unfavorable foreign exchange rates, a weak economic climate and the rising cost of raw materials require that we work even harder to compensate for these adversities," he added.

All this means that suppliers can no longer simply supply ingredients, they have increasingly to think of the growing needs of the consumer, government and industry

"Suppliers must work with customers to identify relevant marketing messages and then create programs to reach target audiences including media, government, consumers, health practitioners and other influencers," he said, adding that this takes significant time and money.

He cited Cognis' sponsorship of the SupplySide West's education program as an example of how industry and government can work together on furthering education.

In general, Weitkemper is optimistic for the future of the supplement industry, especially for products containing ingredients derived from natural-source raw materials, as the worldwide wellness trend continues to grow.

He noted that Cognis was seeing particular interest in plant sterols for heart health, carotenoids for eye health and conjugated linoleic acid for body composition.

"There is a mass movement toward products for health, beauty, anti-aging—for both physical and spiritual well-being—and that translates into tremendous marketing opportunities for our industry."