



Less is More: Formulating With Simplicity

By Beverly Emerson, President of Olive Tree Product Development

Haven't you ever found yourself wishing for the "simpler times of the good old days?" Such a sentiment is increasingly being expressed, and for a very good reason.

We have a knack for complicating our lives, especially with the rapidly evolving technology that, in theory, is supposed to simplify our lives. Whether it is the day-to-day stuff of online banking and tracking our exercise calories on our portable devices, to ensuring the kids get to all their lessons and events, to keeping up with our personal networks on social media, our quest for

making life easier has also resulted in the need for us to be constantly ingesting and learning new, ever-more-complicated information in order to simply survive.

Increasing complexity hits our industry as well. In one sense, all the available information and how to retrieve it has filtered down to the consumer: Have you ever noticed how long it takes the average consumer to make a decision in the supplement aisle? I've seen women stand there for as long as 15 minutes reading labels and trying to compare between three new targeted

multivitamin products.

Adding to this selection strife, it seems like every week there is a new headline shouting the results of studies that are often poorly designed, with compounds studied at levels less than efficacious, sometimes in populations ill-suited for the claims that will eventually be made. Consumers read these headlines and attempt to interpret the results in light of the other 15 (or 150) studies done in the past, and often the latest study hype conflicts glaringly with the studied supplement's previous researched hype.

Finally, Dr. Oz may love it, while Dr. Gupta may only be lukewarm about it.

The result: consumers are confused and overwhelmed—and can be increasingly skeptical of the true value of what our industry has to offer.

It's no wonder that consumers crave the ability to un-plug, de-clutter and simplify their lives. We can help by making supplements and nutritious foods simpler and more appealing. There are three areas where simplicity comes into play.

Simple Ingredient Statements

According to a 2011 study done by The Hartman Group, 60 percent of consumers are looking for foods and beverages that only contain ingredients they recognize. Specifically, they want an ingredient list that is short, recognizable, with no preservatives or additives. This approach helps explain the success in the supplement space of products such as Garden of Life's RAW Meal and Vega, that provide whole food nutrition in smoothies, shakes and bar formats. Newcomers like Umchu bars (sold in the Northwest), which contain only three and five ingredients, providing

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“Primitive Nutrition.”

As product developers, we need to ask the question: Is it necessary to use 10 ingredients when only four of them are used at levels that approach efficacious? We often hide behind the cloak of “proprietary blend,” trying to create differentiation through the illusion that the other six botanicals are really making a difference.

From a technical standpoint, get “double-duty” as much as possible from your ingredients. Formulators working with bars, shakes and beverages should consider high-power ingredients such as ground flaxseed that can provide viscosity, binding and omega-3s. Color can be achieved through natural fruits and unusual vegetable powders (black carrot is one of my favorites).

There are numerous patented whole-food ingredients now that provide significant nutrition and recognizable ingredient state-

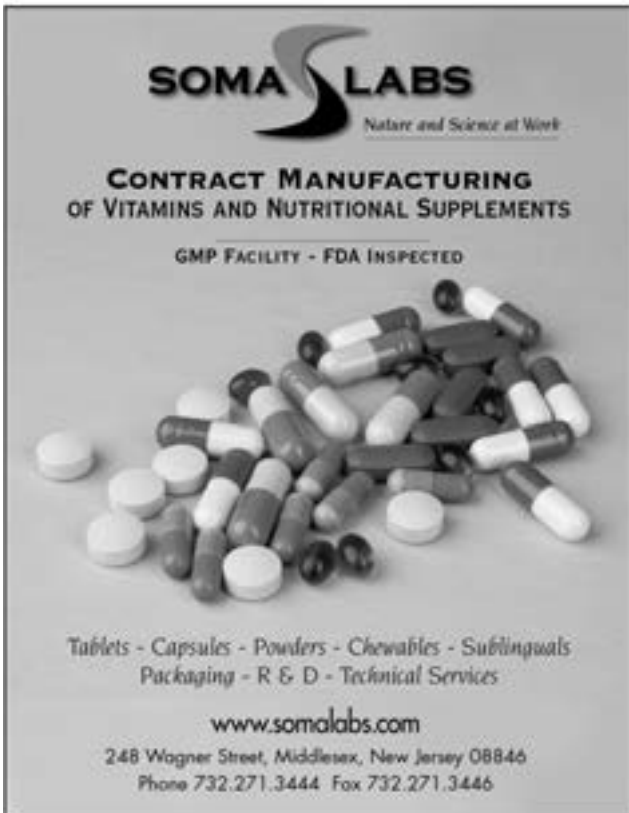
ments.

“Designing a simple, meaningful formula with key ingredients that have strong science behind them will help you to make more focused and hard-hitting claims and messaging,” advised Risa Schulman, PhD, president of New York-based Tap~Root. This clear, simple messaging goes a long way to creating the platform for the brand—that emotional connection that is the most powerful reasons your consumers remain your consumers.

Clear Messaging

I once had a boss who swore that our unique selling proposition had to be stated in five or fewer words. He was right. In this busy, information-overloaded world, the key benefit needs to be communicated as succinctly as possible. Due to constant messaging bombardment all vying for attention, consumers simply don't have the attention spans to read all the fine print. Our message needs to be clear, concise and consistent across all communication channels: product packaging, website and social media outlets, trade show events, retailer materials and traditional advertising.


The most powerful messages are not just about the ingredients or the formulation. The message is about how it makes consumers *feel*—it goes beyond the structure-function claims to how consumers feel and what they are able to accomplish when they are healthy and happy. I work with many companies that are compelled to say 10 or 15



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great things about their product on the front label. Prioritizing consumer messages is key, and being willing to spend the time creating a communication template that guides the team across all channels is well worth it.

Clean Label Design

Retail space is limited and the shelves are crowded. The judicious use of font styles, colors and copy is critical. Illustration decisions need to be made: photos or illustrations? Font style: Italic or block? What colors? If these elements do not present unity or synergism, the product will convey a fragmented and/or incomplete experience.

There are three critical steps in designing a clean, compelling label:

- First, know your audience and develop a brand template before you hand the project over to a graphic designer. More specifically, create a brand template that will serve you regardless of how many products you bring out. Having a consistent look on the shelf is core.
- Second, determine what you want to say on the front label in order of priority. How much real estate will the logo

take up? What marketing claims are going to be on the front label? Remember that the front panel is there to garner sufficient attention and appeal so that the buyer will pick it up and look more closely.

• The biggest mistake that companies make is trying to put too much information onto the principal display panel, and the result is clutter and a label that reads like an appliance manual. Less is more and white space is good. Test the label on-shelf. Does it pop? Does it pull consumers in? Take time in the development cycle to test variations with consumers. Take your team on a field trip to the supplement aisles and select which ones work, and which ones don't.

Conclusion

Will cleaning up our formulas and labels make a difference to the bottom line? When a brand truly differentiates itself from others, creating a product that works better and delivers on attributes that consumers really want, sales do increase. (Not only that, cost of goods can actually go down.)

As brand marketers, we need to consistently get into consumers' heads and

understand very clearly what they think and what they want, and put our own agendas to the side. The key is communicating and connecting with our consumers while delivering with integrity and excellence. We need to figure out where consumers' desires and our technologies and science intersect.

It's called innovation—and sometimes it's simpler than we think. **NIE**



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