



Four Tactics For Superfruit Product Success

Introduction

Superfruits have burst onto the functional food and nutraceutical scene with a juicy splash unmatched by few other ingredient categories. A recently published SPINS report noted that for the year ending in October 2008, superfruit products as a whole amassed \$851 million in sales with a 15% growth over the previous 52 weeks sales. And in conventional markets, the growth was even higher – 19% growth over sales for the previous year in mass sales channels.¹

These fantastic fruits have garnered so much public interest, that consumers are shifting their efforts to meet the 5-a-day fruit and veggie quota away from good ole fresh produce standby's like apples. Instead many of them, especially younger generations, are turning to superfruit products - despite the higher price tags.²

Says consumer research group, The Hartman Group, in their recent POV report *Superfruit*, "Superfruits are a rich opportunity for companies to align with long-term food trends."³

Yet every superhero has its kryptonite . . . and even the powerful consumer interest in superfruits has its limits. While some companies selling superfruit products like Sambazon have thrived in the last year with growth rate of 58.9%, plenty of other companies have launched and failed. Even pomegranate-powered Pom Wonderful stumbled a bit in the same time period, with sales shrinking by 1%.⁴

Is it the economy? Are people watching their budget too much to splurge for an expensive superfruit drink or snack? It's a factor – but not everything.

In fact while superfruit products cost a pretty penny, they may be just the kind of indulgence consumers can afford and want right now.

¹ Scientific Strength & Market Data Confirm the 'Super' in Superfruits webinar. *Natural Products Insider*; Retrieved from <http://www.naturalproductsinsider.com/webinars/2008/12/scientific-strength-and-market-data-confirm-the-super-in-superfruits.aspx>

² Holliday, J. (August 2008). Superfruits disturb the five-a-day balance, warns Datamonitor. *Food Navigator*; Retrieved from <http://www.foodnavigator.com/content/view/print/215330>.

Starling, S. (March 2009). How convenient: superfruits steal fruits' thunder. *Nutraingredients.com*; Retrieved from <http://nutraingredients.com/content/view/print/240283>.

³ Hartman Group. (July, 2009). Superfruit: A Hartman Group Point of View; Retrieved from <http://www.hartman-group.com/downloads/thg-superfruits-pov-2009.pdf>

⁴ Scientific Strength & Market Data Confirm the 'Super' in Superfruits webinar.



As consumers cut back on larger expenses like vacations and home renovations, they've turned to smaller splurges to compensate. A taste of an exotic fruit topped off with the guilt-alleviating health benefits fits right into today's consumers' budget. As the Hartman Group report points out, this is a significant trend to tap into:

"Interest in foods that combine indulgence along with health and wellness benefits to achieve a higher quality of life [is increasing]. And fruits have always been the ideal health food for their ability to deliver on this combination. Most consumers have no problem finding a fruit they truly enjoy eating."⁵

So the economy isn't necessarily a problem for your superfruit products. However, there are some consumer concerns worth paying attention to:

- In the wake of the recent Oprah acai spam scams, consumers are increasingly skeptical of superfruit health benefits. Manufacturers need to make a convincing argument that choosing these exotics over home-grown produce makes sense. A recent Mintel survey found that 38% of fruit juice and juice drink users believe that they can find the benefit of super-premium juices in regular juices.⁶
- Consumers are having a hard time distinguishing superfruit products. With 60 acai products launched in 2008 alone,⁷ consumers need help in deciding which one to choose. Your superfruit product needs to distinguish itself by more than ingredient alone.
- Consumers are concerned about quality of products – how effectively the fresh fruits' health powers are translated into new, processed forms. And when it comes to imports, consumers are even more wary.
- Consumers are concerned about sustainability issues. While local doesn't necessarily trump superfruit's appeal, more and more consumers are weighing the larger costs and factoring it into their decision.

By paying attention to these four issues in developing your products and marketing strategy, you can better secure your piece of the superfruit market pie.

And the best place to start, as we'll discuss at the end, is with the source – your ingredients supplier.

⁵ Hartman Group Report, p. 2

⁶ Heller, L. (April 2009). Time to communicate acai benefits, suggests Mintel. *Nutraingredients-USA.com*; Retrieved from <http://www.nutraingredients-usa.com/content/view/print/242721>.

⁷ Ibid.



No Science – No Superfruit Status?

Paul Gross, Ph. D, author of the new book, *Superfruits* (McGraw-Hill) contends that a fruit only merits superfruit status when adequate science is there to back it. He's documented the dearth of research associated with some of the latest superstars ingredients.⁸

All of us in the industry want to see more research on the ingredients we build our businesses on. Especially when so many of us practice what we preach, applying the nutrition we market to our own personal health care.

And certainly scientific documentation factors into how consumers see potential superfruits as well. Pomegranate has garnered plenty of attention due to the research on it. Clinicaltrials.gov lists no less than 18 clinical trials looking at pomegranate's health benefits.⁹

But there is an inherent contradiction in relying on science to validate superfruits' healthy properties. Many of these fruits are newly "discovered" in this culture, a newness that holds much of their appeal. This also means that western science has not had much time to investigate these new arrivals.

Even so, that doesn't mean a complete absence of proof. While scientific research to unlock the secrets behind a fruit's health benefits is important, it's not everything. For thousands of years, people have relied on these fruits for good health and documented their effects.

And truth be told, much of the consumer shift towards supplements and natural health products stems from this. For many natural product users, science only confirms what people already believe and have experienced personally - that healing can be found in common sense nutrition. Traditional approaches may offer healing and insights that conventional medicine can't.

In fact the Hartman Group has also found in its research that people are often dismissive of the science in making wellness choices. Instead they prefer testimonials and recommendations from close associates.¹⁰

⁸ Gross, P. (July 2009). Comprehensive criteria for Superfruit Status. Natural Products Insider; Retrieved from <http://www.naturalproductsinsider.com/articles/2009/07/comprehensive-criteria-for-superfruit-status.aspx>.

⁹ Clinical Trials.gov; Retrieved from <http://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/results?term=pomegranate>

¹⁰ The Hartman Group (2006). The Case for Vitamins. *Hartbeat*; Retrieved from <http://www.hartman-group.com/hartbeat/the-case-for-vitamins>



Finally, science may have other limits to accurately telling the fruit's story. As Ephraim Lansky, MD, researcher and co-author of *Pomegranate: The Most Medicinal Fruit*, points out, the health benefits of many of these foods lies in the complex synergy of its different components.¹¹ Not necessarily the individual components themselves. Our current technology and reductionist scientific approach has a hard time investigating and recording this reality.

So compromise cannot be avoided. While the more science behind a fruit, the better. Sometimes it's simply not available.

But more importantly, it may not be what people are looking for.

Give Them The Whole Story

The key to marketing superfruit products, is telling their whole story. Telling the whole story involves discussing the science, the folklore, the cultivation and describing the fruit itself in order to give consumers a complete – and juicier – picture of these exceptional fruits.

I. Tell Consumers About The Science:

Tell them about the research that documents the fruit's outstanding health benefits. Pomegranate leads the pack on this, but even more recent arrivals such as amla and breadfruit are making themselves known in the scientific world.

But do more than simply share the data. Tell them the science in a way that consumers can directly connect to. Julian Mellentin, author of recently released Unilever report, *Failures in Functional Foods and What They Reveal About Success*, explains that successful functional foods offer benefits that are relevant to the consumer. Benefits the consumer can feel and relate to.¹²

For example, you can list a number for the fruit on the ORAC scale. But in addition, describe how the fruit develops antioxidants to ward off attacks from pests and disease; and that these very same antioxidants provide the same protection to us humans.¹³ This makes more sense on an instinctive level than numbers and discussions of free radicals.

¹¹ Longtin, R. (2003) The Pomegranate: Nature's Power Fruit? *J. Natl. Cancer Inst*, 95, 346.

¹² (June 2009). Learning from functional foods failures. *Nutraingredients.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.nutraingreideints.com/content/view/print/250201>.

¹³ Benbrook, C. (January 2005). Elevating Antioxidant Levels in Food Through Organic Farming and Processing. *The Organic Center For Education*.



II. Share With Them The "Other" Science

Long before there were Bunsen burners and petri dishes, people were carefully experimenting with food and documenting their experiments. These discoveries have been refined through the ages, developing into a different kind of scientific heritage.

Many fruits that have only recently made it into polished labs have been researched for centuries in traditional cultures. And while there are limits to how this cultural knowledge can be translated into the western health practices and FTC requirements, this "other science" or folklore holds important information nonetheless.

These traditions fill in a gap. Research hasn't yet delved into all these fruits' secrets and maybe won't even be able to in the long run. As mentioned before, these fruits like so many parts of life are enormously complex.

Yet even the Dietary Supplement Health Education Act (DSHEA) acknowledges this form of validation. A traditional history of safe ingestion factors into allowing supplement ingredients into the marketplace.

People who have relied on acai or mangosteen or goji for centuries have an important story to contribute. And consumers want to hear it.

And not only do these stories fill in some of the gaps left by inadequate scientific research, they bring intrigue and entertainment, marketing elements that can only help you hold onto consumers' attention.

II. Introduce Them To The Fruit Itself

Superfruits are not just popular for their health benefits. They offer consumers a quick ticket to the exotic, the promise of a whole new tasty experience.

Remember the Hartman Group observation that superfruits combine "indulgence along with health and wellness benefits"?¹⁴

So don't forget to emphasize the indulgence part. Describe the color, the texture, the flavor. Describe the fruit itself – mangosteen's creamy lobes or amla's almost transparent green-gold skin. This kind of description rounds out the eating or drinking experience, even when the fresh whole fruit is not part of it.

¹⁴ Hartman group. Superfruit report



And along with inviting consumers to try the exotic, in an almost contradictory way, sense-oriented descriptions also helps consumers get over their reservations about trying something unfamiliar. When you describe acai as having a creamy, almost chocolate flavor or that goji berries have a carrot raisin flavor, it gives consumers a point of reference. Armed with this starting point, consumers feel more confident about venturing into new taste sensations.

III. Tell Them About The Quality Without Saying "Quality"

The word "quality" does little to distinguish your product when left alone in a sentence or paragraph. Everyone uses it and consumers have become jaded about the term.

What people are looking for is the story behind the word "quality". The story of a farmer on a box of cereal does more to sell the box than the nutrition panel on the side or even the organic seal. People learn that not only does their cereal have certain vitamins in it, but that it was created with care and hard work. That someone took pride in growing the food that later ends up nurturing them. People can connect with this story.

Similarly with superfruits. Consumers are increasingly aware of the fact that the cultivation method, the harvesting and the processing all contribute to the quality of the experience they have in the end.

Furthermore, more and more consumers are factoring sustainability into their purchasing decisions. Datamonitor consumer analyst, Michael Hughes explained that superfruits' role in supporting sustainable economic development in tropical regions has even tempered the trend towards local purchasing.¹⁵ People like the idea of local foods. But saving the rainforest sounds pretty good, too.

To underscore the quality and uniqueness of your product, bring in the story of how the fruit is grown, the conditions and climate that contribute to its unique characteristics and the quality of the fruit.

A Solution In Your Supplier

A good ingredient supplier supplies you with more than just ingredients for your product. They supply you with ingredients for your marketing as well.

¹⁵ Halliday, J. (January 2008) Superfruit taste, health will over-ride sourcing worries. *Nutraingredients.com*; Retrieved from <http://www.nutraingredients.com/content/view/print/180142>.



In addition to providing ingredients that meet your criteria for formulating a great product, a good supplier supplies you with the information that can make your messaging stand out.

A good supplier helps you to access . . .

- Information about current and past scientific research on the ingredient;
- Information about the folklore around the fruit, especially in the absence of extensive research;
- Descriptions of the fresh fruit itself;
- Information about the method of cultivation and processing.

To do this, the supplier has to be more than a routine import company. It has to be a company with boots on the ground in the countries it sources from. And the company itself should embody curiosity, respect and interest in the fruits that go beyond seeing it as a commodity.

Ecuadorian Rainforest, A Supplier That Takes This Role Seriously

"What makes ER different is the vision and experience that I bring," explains Marlene Hurtado-Siegel, the founder of Ecuadorian Rainforest. Born in Ecuador, Hurtado-Siegel grew up traditional nutritional remedies as an integral part of her life.

"I got my knowledge from my parents, especially my mother. She taught me how to pick and harvest, how to recognize when the fruits will be ready, and when the fruit should not be harvested."

Hurtado-Siegel transformed this knowledge and respect for the traditional use of these fruits into a thriving import business. In addition to a commitment to identifying and sourcing nourishing botanical ingredients from around the world, Ecuadorian Rainforest's success is built on the strong networks Hurtado-Siegel and her staff have cultivated in the countries they source from.

"The key element in the art of working with farmers from South America and beyond is in always remembering my own roots," says Hurtado-Siegel. "For years, before I started the company, I was a citizen of Ecuador, interacting with local farmers in a non-business setting. Now when I conduct business with them it's never 'just business as usual'. It's forming a relationship and, most importantly, being sensitive to their culture and customs."

Ecuadorian Rainforest has transferred this understanding of the importance of nurturing strong ties and doing business in the context of the culture to sourcing from other continents such as Africa and Asia.



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"I've found that same formula works outside of Ecuador; across all borders," observes Hurtado-Siegel. "It is because of this formula - mutual respect, compassion and sensitivity - that our ingredients offerings are so uniquely diverse. We understand the complexities and uniqueness of each individual vendor, enabling us to create long-lasting partnerships which benefits our clients."

For customers, not only does this mean high-quality, unique products, it means direct access to the products' source. When a client inquires about growing or processing practices, field agents contact the cultivator or processor directly and secure an accurate answer. Furthermore, Ecuadorian Rainforest directly supervises the growing and processing of many of the crops themselves.

Hurtado-Siegel's respect for the fruits and folklore also translates into a commitment to sustainable business practices. By supporting small farmers and encouraging the cultivation of high value crops through creating a market, she estimates that they have created a source of income for an estimated 2000-4000 people.

Ecuadorian Rainforest insures that all of its produce is grown pesticide-free and herbicide-free. Instead of synthetic fertilizers, the farmers use rotation and composting to sustain healthy soil and healthy plants. But just as most of them cannot afford to use chemicals on their farms, most of these farmers cannot afford organic certification as well.

As a result, many of Ecuadorian Rainforest products are "wildcrafted". Just a certificate short of certified organic cultivation.

Finally, Ecuadorian Rainforest works hard to secure information about the research that exists. Clinical trial results and published research are regularly posted on its online Knowledgebase database available at www.intotherainforest.com/kb.

Science, folklore, the fruit itself and its cultivation. Ecuadorian Rainforest insures its clients can access all of these facets of the superfruit story.

If you are considering joining the superfruit marketplace or are already a part of it, bring in a supplier who can help you distinguish your products. Contact Ecuadorian Rainforest and speak to one of our sales representatives. **Call 973-759-2002 or go to our website at www.intotherainforest.com.**

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