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Cutting through the noise: active nutrition in 2024

The active nutrition category has never been more competitive. Every day we see new brands launching while existing brands evolve, and all with the same aim: to stand out above their competitors and grab consumers' attention.

Add to this a challenging macroeconomic backdrop and the world becomes very noisy. But rather than adding to the noise, there are a number of things that brands, ingredients suppliers and manufacturers alike should be considering that can help them create genuine cut-through and impact.

Defining active — or proactive — nutrition

Before we start, it's useful to consider what the active nutrition category currently looks like; as the category expands, so too do the functions of products that fall within it.

As a general rule, products within this world improve health and wellness, mind, and body and these days can be broadly split into four categories:



1 Sports nutrition

The original domain — products focused on improving performance that are consumed before, during and after exercise.

2 Functional nutrition

Products that improve health (body and mind; “wellness”) and promote agelessness.

3 Every day energy

Products focused on providing energy, both mental and physical, throughout the day.

4 Convenient food and snacks

Products that are better for you and healthier alternatives to everyday snacking and daily food choices.

Overall, we can see that most of the categories remain performance-orientated, but we can also begin to see how active nutrition is evolving as the lines between the different areas increasingly blur. And as consumers become more motivated to take charge of their health, a new descriptor also springs to mind — proactive nutrition.

Accepting a new reality

At the beginning of every year we hear one word on repeat: trends. But more often than not, the trends in question are already well known and only build on the previous year's focuses. At some point, trends eventually become part of our everyday life — a new reality that then goes on to underpin all future trends.

The new reality as we see now it centres around the following beliefs:

A proactive future

Consumers are seeking ways to be more positive about their health and wellness

Clean, sustainable and memorable

Products need to be both better for consumers and the environment, while also providing an experience — that is, one that's memorable enough to be shared in a social media-driven world

A digital revolution

Technology is changing the way we shop, the way we engage and even what's available

Value for money

Consumers want reassurance that what they buy is worth it

By keeping these front of mind when taking any new product to market, we can begin to build a more informed picture of what 'success' means within a particular trend.

Take plant-based for example; a topic that's been trending since 2016. Eight years on, and simply creating a plant-based product no longer moves the needle. But a plant-based product that supports health and wellness, is sustainable and offers a memorable and shareable experience? Now you're starting to create some cut-through.

It's also important to consider how audiences are evolving too, and what the reality is rather than what traditional marketing profiles tell you it is. For the first time, we're seeing multiple generations engaging with sports nutrition, dietary supplements and more proactive behaviours in general.





On the face of it, this may seem like an opportunity as the audience size expands, but it can also be a stumbling block.

But for a brand that has always targeted 18-25 year olds, the reality is that this group is an entirely different generation than it was even ten years ago. It may sound obvious, but these individuals have grown up very differently to people in their mid-30s, and as a result look for different values and virtues from their brands.

The question here for brands is: how do they evolve?

To differentiate, brands must get creative

The blueprint of the proactive nutrition sector is actually very stable, with ingredients and health concerns that rarely change. And while the importance of stability isn't to be underestimated, the downside is that it provides little opportunity for new products or ingredients to break through.

So in order to differentiate, brands need to get creative.

But this doesn't necessarily mean starting from scratch. Instead, there are some really simple but meaningful ways of standing out.

Redefine and reimagine

Innovation by communication and the redefinition of conventional products so they connect with consumers on an emotional level.

Breaking the taboo

Communities coming together and valuing strength in honest and genuine conversations, and brands responding to consumer demands for authenticity, specifically in the areas of gut health, women's health and the menstrual cycle, and menopause.

These areas underpin all next-generation brands

Need connectivity

Building health platforms that are multi-dimensional to offer myriad benefits within a product portfolio. For example, bringing together weight management and mood, or sports nutrition and aesthetics.

Surprisingly familiar

Making new products available in familiar ways to engage more people, such as gummies and protein cereal.

Product and beyond

The creation of a system of products that complement a core product and make it stickier for repurchase.

These are areas where brands can refine their propositions and build expertise

Generational energy

Positively shifting perceptions on energy are broadening the market to include everyone, everywhere. Energy is increasingly being considered as part of a healthier lifestyle, moving away from previous connotations of peaks and troughs.

Mind over body

Putting brain health first and building consumer understanding that good mental health is linked to better physical health outcomes

Agelessness

A shift away from the negative connotations of 'anti-ageing' and towards the endless opportunities of 'agelessness' and those adopting habits for longevity.

Digital impact

Recognising the health impact of digitally driven lifestyles and positioning products as solutions to some of these issues. For example, lutein for eye health or collagen for musculoskeletal issues.

Foundational health

Creating a small number of core products that meet most of a consumers' foundational health needs, helping them through decision fatigue and market oversaturation.

Brand focus

Redefine and reimagine

Convenience food and meal replacement drinks aren't new, but **Huel** has redefined and reimaged the purpose of what its products can offer today's consumers. Whereas 20 years ago Slim Fast was billed as a weight loss drink, Huel has considered the generational shift alongside the growing interest in protein over diet, and emotionally connected with its audience around products that offer convenience without sacrificing nutritional needs.

Similarly, **Myrkl** is taking what Berocca has offered for a long time — a 'feel great' positioning for a multivitamin — and marketed it as being specifically for a hangover scenario.



Brand focus

Need connectivity

Guud has innovated within its core positioning to really own its health platform — women’s health — and create an emotional connection with its audience. Its products are grouped by health concerns (menstrual health, skin, pregnancy) to offer a multi-faceted approach, while its team of experts creates a ‘support function’ to answer “any questions you may have — trust us, we’ve heard it all”.

Brand focus


Product and beyond

Waterdrop has gone beyond its core hydration tablet product by creating the hardware that goes with it — beautifully designed bottles underpinned by online influencers. The result is that people are as interested in the bottle as they are the product itself, making them more likely to keep returning to the brand.

Cutting through the noise, effectively

We too often approach trends with the question of “what’s new”, but it’s the wrong question to ask; instead we need to be thinking about what’s changed, evolved, or been redefined.

Our landscape of products is already well-defined. The companies that win will be those that take everything they already know and decide how best to use it to suit the consumers of today.

By adopting some of these key principles and, more to the point, bringing multiple principles together within the context of the proactive nutrition category and today’s new reality, businesses can not only cut through the noise, but can take products from being unsuccessful to being huge hits. 

We’re Nutrition Integrated.

A specialist data and insights provider for the active nutrition market. This category focus means our expert driven data and insight provides unique and unparalleled context.

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