



Score with sports nutrition

Sports nutrition is growing and retailers are starting to see the sales potential of stocking such a department in-store. Starting off with a smaller range and listening to customers' feedback will be key to its success.

Customer education is key for this department's success

BY LAURA DURHAM

The sports nutrition market has grown exponentially over the past few years as consumers become more aware of their health. The need for a healthy and active lifestyle has prompted many consumers to join gyms and sports clubs and, as a result, sports nutrition has become a necessary part of daily life. Stock these products in your store and introduce education campaigns to make your store the shopping goal for sports fanatics.

Sports nutrition defined

"Sports nutrition is foods or supplements aimed at assisting us to perform at our best in our chosen sport," explains Mark Woolf,

MD of 32GI and avid athlete. The products available are split into two main groups: athletic and endurance sports products (which generally consist of the energy and exercise recovery brands) and health and fitness categories (which are made up of body shaping products). "And the combinations and choices in the market are vast and continually growing," he adds.

But what exactly do these products DO?

Sports nutrition has many goals to enhance performance. By improving an athlete's body composition, their speed, quickness, mobility and strength greatly improve. Also, supplements and the like improve the speed of recovery, which is important for athletes' rigorous training schedules.

"Sports nutrition is based on those products that offer liquid food and play a role in nutrient timing as these proteins and carbohydrates and some nutraceuticals

have an optimal nutrition effect (recovery) when given at the right time," further explains Allana Moskovitz, marketing and brand manager at SOLAL Technologies. For example, a body builder often has to dramatically increase his protein intake. This can be achieved through a liquid protein shake rather than him having to eat large meals of meat.

The other part of sports nutrition rests on ergogenic substances; products that are taken with the aim to increase performance. "Careful consideration should be taken when deciding the type and quality of nutrients to be added to the athlete's daily diet – depending on the type of exercise, unique requirements and level of participation of the athlete," says Adele Hutchons, product manager at Nativa.

Increasing energy levels

Many of your customers lead very stressful lives and it is too easy for a latté or a pie ▶

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on the run to substitute a meal. These types of foods have a high glycemic index (GI), which results in an energy spike followed by a low, which is then refueled when the same types of foods are consumed. For anyone, and especially athletes, this is not a healthy lifestyle to follow. "The advantage of low GI eating is that it provides a far more balanced energy lifestyle – it keeps your mind and body stable with a slow and sustainable release of energy and the rewards are a healthier and fitter body and mind," explains Woolf.



Cross-merchandise sports equipment and accessories in your sports nutrition department to increase interest levels and encourage impulse buying.

But, in the sports arena, low GI sports drinks have actually been looked down upon and athletes rather choose a high GI product when exercising at a very high intensity to aid physical and mental performance. If you look around a gym, many gym goers carry around these high sugar-based energy drinks widely available on the market because they think their 60-minute workout justifies such a beverage.

"The problem though is that most athletes are not performing at a high intensity for a long duration of time, and the glucose overload tends to become the norm which is not warranted. So what we are seeing is people out there training, getting fit and trying to stay healthy, but they are actually gaining weight and finding their energy levels on an emotional and physical roller coaster ride," he says.

Mainstreaming sports nutrition

Sports nutrition is no longer limited to speciality stores and many retailers, particularly the pharmacy chains, have begun stocking their shelves with some of the products. And the convenience of

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Energy and sports drinks positioned at the checkouts will encourage impulse sales – especially for those customers exhausted by their grocery shop!

a one-stop shop is certainly paying off. "These stores need to understand that athletes do two shops a month, one being a monthly food shop and the second being

a monthly supplement shop. It's far more convenient to be able to go to one store which will provide all needs in a single shop," Woolf says.

This 'mainstreaming' is good for the manufacturers but unless there is a trained staff member on hand to educate and advise, customers are not better off at all.

Education is vital for growth

Customers often need advice about which products to buy but there is not a specialised assistant (e.g. in a supermarket) on hand. "This is where customers, especially young teenagers, buy the incorrect products lured into it by the name and claims on the packaging," says Moskovitz.

"It is known that more than 30% of sports nutrition products on the market have hidden substances in them (meaning not listed on the label) as they hope to increase their market share by their users experiencing the 'added' value, however often forbidden substances in the sport arena," she adds.

"It is therefore vital that staff members are educated and knowledgeable on nutrition and the products available on store," says Hutchons. If an athlete is left even more confused about the product choice and what they are supposed to do with them, then chances are they will move to a specialist store.

Woolf suggests that it would help if the staff member is an athlete themselves but someone who has a non-biased approach ►



Make your store a one-stop shop by introducing sports nutrition. Athletes would prefer to go to a store that caters for their grocery needs, as well as their supplement and nutrition requirements.

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to the products available. "The largest problem facing the large retail stores is that there is no major point of customer presence but I believe that sports nutrition is most certainly important enough to warrant this," he adds.

The challenge for retailers is to create awareness and educate their customers to become empowered to make healthier food choices. A supplement, such as a sports drink is just that – a supplement to a healthy diet. Customers need to be continually made aware that there is no quick fix – no magic pill to make them

stronger, thinner, or quicker on the sports field. "There are no cutting corners: a healthy nutrition regime must be implemented before looking at a supplement and there are many nutrition experts out there to assist in providing the steps to proper healthy diet," Woolf says.

The growth of functional foods

Consumers are under more pressure than ever to perform at work, on the sports field and at home. "Functional foods have become supermarket staples with their benefits of providing energy, boosting the immune system and reducing the risk of disease, as well as enhancing health and appearance," says Hutchons.



Place energy bars, gels and sweets next to your tills as a last attempt at impulse sales.



In-store promotions and making the shopping experience for customers will help to boost sales in departments that are not typically mainstream, such as sports nutrition.

Many consumers prefer eating for their health as opposed to swallowing supplements or shakes, hence the growth of the healthy foods segment. However, the laissez-faire approach by marketers will soon be reined in once the new labeling regulations are put in place early next year. For now, marketers have to worry about the Consumer Protection Act (coming into effect 1 April) which will give consumers the power to take manufacturers and retailers to task over what they buy – and the claims made on the packaging. For example, no avocado producer can claim that their variety is 'cholesterol free', seeing as every avocado produced anywhere is naturally so.

How to boost your sports nutrition sales in-store:

- **In-store promotions.** Get customers to try a new sports energy drink as they begin their shop. Why not set up a half time / pit stop stand in the middle of your store to allow customers to refuel on some healthy snacks and learn about sports nutrition?
- **Educate, educate, educate!** Having someone on hand at your sports nutrition department is invaluable for both customers, who need to know what products to buy for their goals; and for your sales, as customers learn that they can get all they need from your store rather than bother with a speciality one.
- **One stop shop.** Boost your convenience image by boasting about your sports nutrition department in your advertising and promotions.
- **Cross-merchandise.** Mix up your offering to the health conscious and athletic – place energy bars next to the supplements, situate healthy snacks (for example, dried fruit and nuts) next to your sports energy drinks.
- **Make it fun.** Decorate a stand with sports paraphernalia (soccer balls, cricket bats, swimming goggles etc) to attract customers and create a fun and interactive point of sale. You could even set up mini competitions outside your store – bouncing balls on bats, fishing for a prize, skipping rope jumps – for customers (and their children!) to enjoy during the weekend. This will be a great opportunity to explain the benefits of sports and promote healthy products you have in-store. 