

Q&A: Formulating Success

Eric Schnell, Founder & CEO, MetaBrand



Eric Schnell, co-founder of Steaz Teas and I Am Enlightened Nutrition, has spent the majority of his career helping natural product brands move from concept to retail shelves. Schnell speaks with *Food Manufacturing* about his latest venture, MetaBrand, which is designed to help natural product entrepreneurs perfect their processes and formulations for success in the retail arena.

Q: What is MetaBrand and what services does it offer to food companies?

A: MetaBrand offers a turnkey solution for the creation of innovative beverage and supplement concepts. MetaBrand brings together all the resources needed to move from an initial product concept to formulation, packaging design, production, marketing and new distribution.

Q: What inspired the creation of MetaBrand?

A: There really is no other resource available to introduce experienced industry leaders to entrepreneurs who will guide them through the entire process from concept to execution. Most other resources provide only part of the tools needed for a successful market entry. MetaBrand fills this gap by offering to lead a product from the first vision to launch.

Q: Briefly describe the product development process at MetaBrand.

A: Aspirational creators bring new concepts to the MetaBrand team for an initial discussion. MetaBrand takes the opportunity to review the steps required to move from sourcing, formulation, design, production to building a marketing plan for launch. Once the full process is understood, MetaBrand selects the team who will be assigned to lead the project based on the needs of the specific product. MetaBrand is able to quickly and efficiently produce samples which can be refined through rounds of taste testing. Once the final formula is selected, a production model with

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various packaging and pricing scenarios is developed. The process is not complete until a commercially viable concept is reached.

Q: What trends have you seen in the natural food and beverage industry?

A: More focus on single origin, traceable ingredients with distinctive and identifiable cultural and culinary heritage are up and coming trends in the industry. In addition to non-GMO, gluten free, organic and other established characteristics, there is an obvious focus on finding new applications for innovative ingredients. There is an ongoing interest in sourcing indigenous fruits and other ingredients and combining them in unique flavor profiles to provide consumers with new experiences. Manufacturers are bringing products to market that would not previously have been available to consumers who have not had the opportunity to travel widely and experience less familiar cuisines. This approach requires including product education and exposure with new product concepts.

Q: What advice would you offer to those launching natural food products for the first time?

A: Fully examine the products currently available in the target category in the retail channel you are trying to reach. Search for the opportunity gap that your product concept will fill. Retail shelf space is valuable real estate and buyers are looking for partners that bring unique and distinctive products to their consumers.

Interview by Lindsey Coblentz, Associate Editor

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