

# An Introduction to Marketing Nutrition

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Marketing is not simply a clever “Got Milk” advertising campaign, or a 50 cent coupon on a soy burger, or a convenient combination-pack of pre-cut vegetables. In the context of nutrition, marketing is much broader. It focuses on all efforts to encourage and enable people to eat more nutritiously. Many people involved in marketing might call it education, or public service, or simply “being a good parent.” In the context of nutrition, marketing refers to any efforts that encourage consumers to eat more healthy. Sometimes it takes the form of education programs or innovative distribution programs; sometimes it takes the form of more direct efforts. Marketing encompasses the following decisions:

- A dietician is thinking how to best motivate a recovering surgery patient to maintain a high fiber diet.

- A food administrator is trying to determine how to best teach food aid recipients of a developing country how to use protein-rich grains in new recipes.
- A brand manager is trying to determine what information to highlight on the label of his product and whether to distribute it through health foods stores or through mass market channels.

Each of these individuals is addressing a marketing-related challenge that involves encouraging others to change from less nutritious eating patterns to more nutritious ones. This is not unlike what happens when a mother tries to encourage her children to eat carrots by shredding them and putting them into orange Jell-O. Although simple in concept, this becomes much more difficult to execute the farther we move from shredded carrots at the dinner table. Part of this difficulty can be attributed to some of the well-meaning, but misguided perspectives that are brought to the marketing of nutrition.

### **Three Misguided Perspectives of Marketing Nutrition**

Despite the tremendous importance of nutrition in our lives and in the lives of those in developing countries, efforts to encourage the consumption of nutritious foods have been surprisingly ineffective (Wansink 2002). This is often because these efforts are directed by talented people who have the right intentions but the wrong experiences. Their hearts are in the right place, but their experience is not. Consider three perspectives from three different people: A dietician, and government administrator, and a marketing manager.

### **1. The "Nutritional Knowledge is Power" Perspective -- Dietician**

Sometimes it is assumed that once people know that food is nutritious, they will want to eat it. These efforts have been generally unsuccessful in the same way that knowing that doing 50 sit-ups every morning is good for us does not stimulate many of us to do these 50 sit-ups. The "Nutritional Knowledge is Power" perspective is often the approach of many well-meaning nutrition experts and dieticians. Their intimacy with nutritional knowledge leads them to believe that simply passing on this knowing will be all that is necessary to induce change. Essentially after delivering their message of health, some believe they can wave good-bye while stating "my work here is done." Unfortunately,

many people will not eat any healthier even if we can get them to "pass the nutrition quiz."

Figure 1 illustrates that less than 20% of the population is actively trying to reduce the sugar, fats, oils, and junk food that they currently eat. It is doubtful they believe these are good for them to eat, yet they continue to do so.

**"Insert Figure 1. here"**

## **2. The "Food Aid is Food Eaten" Perspective -- Government**

### **Administrator**

A second approach to marketing nutrition or encouraging a change in eating behavior assumes that desperate people resort to desperate measures. This is akin to assuming that if people are starving, dumping a barge load of grain in front of them will guarantee that they will eat it. Perhaps this is true under such extreme circumstances.

For developed countries, the reality of most work in nutrition today is less an issue of solving starvation and more an issue of solving nutritional deficiencies. It's less an issue of enough calories and more an issue of the right calories. The majority of the US population is thankfully above the starvation

line. The issue now is no longer whether one will eat enough food. It is instead whether they will eat the right food. Some have argued that obesity has a disproportionate effect on Americans who are living closest to the poverty line. Clearly, their lack of income is not resulting in starvation -- quite the opposite. These people are making choices in the food they eat, yet they are not nutritious choices. The "Food Aid is Food Eaten" assumption is not relevant to people who can elect to consume food that tastes better but may be much less nutritionally dense.

### **3. The "Marketing Nutrition is Like Marketing Soap" Perspective -- Marketing Manager**

A third perspective in the marketing of nutrition is to assume that marketing nutrition to consumers is the same as marketing any other attribute of a product - whether it be fluoride for toothpaste, passenger-side airbags for cars, or a spring fresh scent for a detergent. In reality, food is a much different venue than the more rational contexts of toothpaste shopping and car shopping. For one, everyone is an expert with foods - we all know what we like. Yet the marketing of nutritious foods must delicately balance emotion with reason. Convincing someone to eat soy because it may help reduce weight will be unsuccessful if consumer either sees it as a magic pill that will

eliminate health problems, or if they see it as something they have to tolerate - like medicine - a couple times before returning to a diet of rare hamburger.

#### **4. The "Here's the Results; My Work is Done" Perspective - Scientists and Researchers**

A fourth perspective in the marketing of nutrition is to simply abdicate any responsibility facilitating the useful dissemination of relevant insights. The distracting multiple-project-life of an active researcher can lead us to make the discovery and move on to the next project. Once the finding is published we generally cease and desist any efforts at communicating it or leveraging it. Many papers take hundreds of hours to conceptualize, test, write, revise, and publish. In many fields it is not uncommon for projects to continue for six or more years before being published. If researchers and academics would allocate only 5% extra effort to helping promote and market the insights they generated, they might as much as double their "real world" impact.

Yet the notion of making a discovery more relevant, effective, or "marketable" is anathema to most academics (although that is the philosophy behind the founding of the Land Grant Institutions that pay many of their salaries). Increasingly,

however, the most effective academics are those who have been able to critically conduct research while also keeping an eye on how its results can best be implemented. In some cases this influences how or where the research is done. In other cases it can influence with whom it is done. This could be a partnership with a social scientist who focuses on the consumer adoption or it could be professionals who specialize in implementation. Simply being a biochemistry expert isn't enough anymore.

All four of these perspectives are commonly observed in the marketing of nutrition. Yet this may not be surprising. Many people in nutrition are expertly versed in directions other than consumer acceptance issues. Dieticians are well versed in the science behind the food, not in the acceptance of the foods. Government officials working with food aid are often experts in logistics and in project management, and less familiar in consumer acceptance or compliance. Brand managers who recently find themselves working with "health foods" (perhaps as part of a two year rotation) are experts in marketing, price promotions, and advertising for popular brands of soap and cereal. They are less familiar with a product that has little or no established following and which often necessitates a trade-off between healthy benefits and the more easily promoted hedonic ones.

The objective of this book is to broaden and deepen the understanding of all four of these perspectives in a way that will help health professionals, government officials, brand managers, and researchers better encourage the adoption and consumption of nutritious foods among their constituents. For the dieticians, these people might be clients. For the governmental official, they might be those in disaster-stricken areas or disadvantaged citizens of developing countries. For the brand manager they may be people who are switching from less healthy brands to more healthy ones. For the researcher, they may be intermediary state extension experts or media representatives that are trying to make the findings relevant to the public.

Each of the four types of mistakes made in marketing nutrition bring with their own sets of biases. The fifteen chapters in Marketing Nutrition are intended to help each group gain a wider understanding of how to market nutrition and how to think about their specific situation regardless of how unique it may be. Each draws from original research that has been conducted in the Food and Brand Lab at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign.

## Organization of the Book

As shown in Figure 2, the book is divided into five sections: I. Secrets about Food and People, II. Tools for Targeting, III. The Health of Nations, IV. Labeling that Actually Works, IV. Marketing Nutrition. Each is briefly introduced below.

**"Insert Figure 2. here"**

### **Section I.**

#### **Secrets about Food and People**

In this section, we will first look at the gap between what people know and what they do. This section examines the "Nutritional Knowledge is Power" perspective because it shows that while nutritional knowledge is not necessarily related to nutritional eating habits, certain combinations of nutritional knowledge are more likely to influence consumption than others. Chapter 1 (Nutrition Knowledge that Matters) demonstrates that while some people have no nutritional knowledge about a product such as soy, others know only about the attributes of soy (such as vegetarian or low in fat), and others know only about the health benefits of eating it (such as good for my heart). Interestingly,

however, the findings in this chapter show that a person is most likely to eat a healthy food when they know about both the attributes of the food and how these lead to the health benefits of eating it.

Chapter 2 (Classified World War II Secrets) takes advantage of recently declassified Department of Defense studies that are relevant to our mission. Marketers often behave as though the problems or dilemmas they face are stylistically unique and never before been encountered. Yet the marketing of nutrition has been active for many years. Many of the problems of food acceptance that are faced today are analogous to those faced in 1942-5 when the Committee on Food Habits tried to encourage Americans to eat organ meats to help address protein shortages due to the war effort. Convincing people to eat organ meats in World War II was difficult - it was cursed with bad associations ("it's gross" and "it's not for people like me"), it wasn't part of a routine, and people didn't know how to prepare it. It is the same way with many healthy foods available today. In Chapter 2 we evaluate this previously ignored research to show that basic lessons about changing consumer tastes are as relevant today as they were during World War II.

People know what they like, right? Apparently not. Chapter 3 (If it Sounds Good, it Tastes Good) vividly illustrates that the

tastes of consumers are very suggestible. Sometimes, simply changing the label of a package can cause them to “taste” ingredients that can dramatically bias their evaluation and their purchase likelihood of the product. The effect of these labels, however, varies across segments. It is then important to understand what can be done to best communicate health information while minimizing taste aversion. Building on this, this chapter also shows that descriptive names for foods make people taste what they believe they will taste. Not only do descriptive names influence a person’s taste of a food, but they also make them believe the food has more calories and even that the restaurant they bought it is better. Although the French have an expression that there is no accounting for taste, we believe differently.

## **Section II.**

### **Tools for Targeting**

A key misunderstanding that creates a good deal of the disconnection between nutrition education and behavior change is partially due to ineffective targeting. Some people will more easily comply with nutrition-related suggestions than others. Rather than approaching all people in a generic, one-size-fits all manner, it is important to realize that some groups will be more predisposed to some messages and interventions than others. While

the basic notion of segmenting and targeting consumers is not new, this section shows how tastes can be segmented, and how nutrition education and healthy marketing campaigns can be more efficient by taking these different tastes into account.

The first two chapters of this section examine techniques that can be used to identify the taste preferences and adoption likelihood among a number of segments. Chapter 4 (Profiling the Perfect Consumer) shows how to profile or “paint a picture” of the ideal consumer. To best understand and target a person for nutritional change, it is effective to profile the person. Using soy as an illustration, this chapter shows how to profile ideal customers in a manner that enables better taste targeting.

While Chapter 4 examines the importance of using profiling as a method to better understand who the perfect consumers are, Chapter 5 (Mental Maps that Lead to Consumer Insights) shows how mental mapping can be used to understand why they act (and eat) the way they do. When trying to encourage people to eat a particular food, valuable insights can be gained by understanding why frequent consumers of the food like it so much. These perfect consumers have a mental map - associations and benefits -- of the target food that helps explain why they like it so much. Identifying and illustrating these mental maps gives us insights

into how we can convert infrequent consumers of the food into more frequent consumers.

A central theme of this section is that marketing nutrition efforts should be focused on those people who are either most likely to be influenced or those who are most likely to influence others. Research consistently shows that good cooks are the nutritional gatekeepers of their homes, and they estimate they end up determining - directly or indirectly - 72% of their family's food intake. Who are these good cooks, and how can they be categorized and targeted? Chapter 6 (Targeting Nutritional Gatekeepers) answers this question. Its findings show that five general types of cooks comprise over 90% of the influential cooks in North America, but only three are likely to make selected nutritional foods a part of dinner on a regular basis.

### **Section III.**

#### **The Health of Nations**

Section III addresses four of the more critical food-related issues facing developed countries today: 1) Decreasing obesity, 2) increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, 3) improving the

understanding of biotechnology, and 4) minimizing and managing food crises.

People want a variety of high-value, tasty foods that they can have in large quantities whenever convenient. This is one reason overeating at McDonalds is so much easier to do than regularly convincing children to eat broccoli. Although catering to our biological interests, food companies have recently been accused of also contributing to the growing problem of obesity in the United States. After examining three inarguable consumer demands that lead us to this problem, Chapter 7 (The De-Marketing of Obesity) outlines the five main drivers of food consumption and shows what smart marketers and motivated companies can and cannot do to counter the effect of each of these drivers.

Chapter 8 (Why Five-a-Day Programs Often Fail) begins by showing why Five-a-Day programs often fail in their objective of increasing fruit and vegetable consumption. These efforts are doomed from the start when they begin making generic appeals to all. It is important to understand that taste profiles and behaviors for fruit lovers are different than vegetable lovers. Some people are more predisposed to one than another, and they should be targeted accordingly.

While information can sometimes encourage a person to eat a food, in other cases, it can prevent them from eating it. It's a risky business, and biotechnology is an important case-in-point. Chapter 9 (Winning the Biotechnology Battle) shows that part of the reason why both proponents and opponents of biotechnology have been unsuccessful in changing the behavior of consumers is because they do not understand how consumers learn about biotechnology and the implications it has on what and how to communicate to them. One ongoing theme in this chapter is that the battle over non-organic foods is never over. To maintain the trust and acceptance of a reasoned public, the communication efforts between the health, nutrition -and risks - of biotechnology must be continuously addressed.

Yet even with continuous and open channels of communication, there are some segments of consumers who behave much differently to uncertainty and risk than others. The result can be public panic. Chapter 10 (Managing Consumer Reactions to Food Crises) shows what happens when a food safety crisis threatens a food supply. Based on case studies and on data from the BSE (Mad Cow Disease) crises in Europe, generalizations are made about how different segments of people respond to different types of information. After describing these segments, suggestions are

provided on how to manage reactions through proactive pre-crisis preparations and through crisis-related responses.

## **Section IV.**

### **Labeling that Actually Works**

A general theme in this book is that different types of information influence different types of consumers in different ways. In this section, the question now becomes how such information can be communicated in a way that generates the most impact. To best leverage labels and nutritional claims, we focus specifically on how claims and labels can be made more compelling.

Communicating health benefits is especially important with FDA health claims. It is often thought that the costly and time-consuming process involved in earning an FDA health claim will subsequently provide the magic key that increases a product's acceptance and solves all of the marketing woes of producers and manufacturers. In most cases, however, the results of these labels is promising in the short-run, but disappointing in the long-run. By looking at the success and failures of FDA claims in the past, Chapter 11 (Leveraging FDA Health Claims) shows how FDA claims have been best leveraged in the past, and implications for leveraging them better in the future.

With nutrition information, the message can be so confusing as to not have any impact on consumers. Chapter 12 (Health Claims - When Less Equals More) examines how experimenting with different types of labels (long vs. short and front vs. back) can increase a label's persuasiveness. We provide evidence that combining a short label on the front of a package with a detailed label on the back of the package is the most persuasive means to communicate a health benefit.

### **Section V.**

#### **Marketing Nutrition**

While earlier chapters focused on profiling individuals and highly definable segments, Chapter 13 (Introducing Unfamiliar Foods to Unfamiliar Lands) shows how entire countries and cultures can be profiled in order to determine which will be the most likely to adopt various foods. An important question to food aid organizations and companies who have limited resources and distribution dollars is the following: Which cultures will be most likely to adopt a given nutritional food most cost-effectively? A framework is developed that shows how the cooking methods and the strength of ethnic identity are key criteria in determining how quickly a country will adopt a new food. Case

studies of Russia and Columbia show how this would be done in two different cultures. The basic framework that is developed can be used to help prioritize distribution efforts in any culture or segment. It can also be used to help estimate the effectiveness of various forms of food aid.

In Chapter 14 (Global Best Practices), a series of best practices from 153 functional food products across the world to provide tactical suggestions that have proven successful in helping incorporate functional foods into mainstream diets and into long term eating patterns. Five key themes are identified and each is illustrated along with the specific best practices that relate to it. These best practices are categorized as relating to one of the "4 Ps" of marketing: Promotion, Price, Product, or Place. These 4Ps are referred to as the "marketing mix" because they simplistically represent the four levers a marketer can use when trying to encourage a person to consider a particular product. Although the boundaries between these 4 Ps is not always clear, this chapter provides a convenient way for a reader to begin organizing his or her marketing toolbox.

## **Section VI.**

## **Conclusion**

In the concluding chapter (Chapter 15, Looking Backward and Speeding Forward), we revisit the four commonly misleading perspectives noted at the beginning of this book. We then show how each chapter was intended to contribute to a change in perspective.

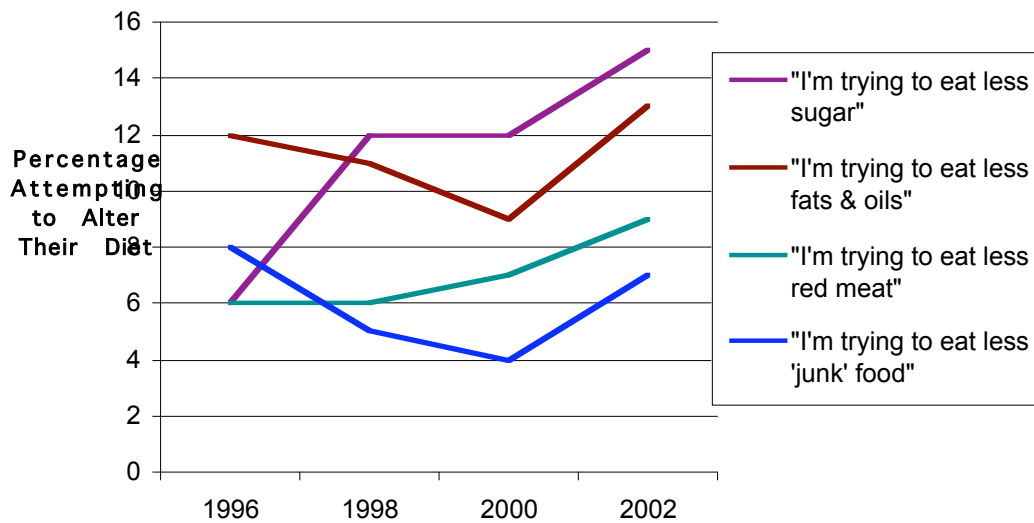
### Summary

Throughout the chapters of this book there a wide variety of products and contexts will be used as illustrations. While beef might be the focus of one chapter and soy the focus of another, they are all just examples to illustrate basic principles. They will be applicable to other products and other contexts. The subtitle of this book - implications for soy, functional foods, biotechnology, and obesity - note four important contexts and issues in which marketing nutrition has become important and visible. While specific references are made to each throughout the book, the general principles are often germane across all. Similarly, the renewed efforts in encouraging the consumption of five fruits and vegetables a day can be sharpened, more focused, and more cost effective based on the insights in this book. While Chapter 8 deals specifically with an approach to improve the Five-

A-Day program, each chapter has ideas that can be appropriated and applied.

In the end, the true challenge in marketing nutrition is not in reinventing the wheel, it is in taking the lessons from the failures and successes of others and applying them to your context in a way that improves changes for consumer acceptances. The same tools and insights that have helped make less nutritious products popular are also the best opportunities to bring people back to a nutritious lifestyle.

**Figure 1.**  
**Eating More Nutritiously is a Priority for Less than 20% of the Population**



**Figure 2.**  
**Organization of Marketing Nutrition**

