

# VITAGEN COLLAGEN: A Strategic Innovation

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The local food sector may not be huge, yet it remains vibrant and innovative. Despite fierce competition within the industry, Malaysia Dairy Industries (MDI) is always striving to maintain its status as one of the leading beverage manufacturers in Singapore through innovation. Take for instance, VITAGEN COLLAGEN - winner for innovation in the SIFST Food Product Awards 2007-2009, elected as the Most Innovative Product Worldwide (2007) by the ORAFITI Sales Network. VITAGEN COLLAGEN also recently emerged as a Global Winner in the category of "Communicating Science-Related Knowledge with Consumers", in the inaugural IUFOST Global Food Industry Awards during the 14th World Congress in Food Science & Technology 2008. On top of gaining recognition from various professional bodies, its recent star innovation has also brought much excitement to consumers and has been reaping commercial gains.

In order to keep up with the market's need for healthier products, one of MDI's core products - VITAGEN, which was developed in the 1970s, went through an overhaul in its formulation to become VITAGEN LESS SUGAR in 2005. Its sugar content was reduced so that it became healthier than other regular cultured milk drinks, which have at least 50% more sugar than VITAGEN LESS SUGAR. The move was met with success as increasingly health-conscious consumers embraced VITAGEN LESS SUGAR. Following the successful transition, MDI realised there was a potential to take another step in bid to grow its market share in the cultured milk category. Hence, they decided to create a new product that would propel another wave of sensation for their consumers.

However, innovation is never without worries. Statistics have suggested that around 80 - 90% of all new products fail. Hence, to increase MDI's chances of success, they decided to innovate from a thriving product, such as VITAGEN LESS SUGAR, and aligned their next innovation with key market trends that anticipated consumers' needs.

The market had been keen on products that promote digestive health and wellness. This set VITAGEN LESS SUGAR in a favourable position, as it is an established probiotic product in the region and even contains prebiotics, which was added to stimulate the growth of beneficial gut bacteria and to serve



as dietary fibre. Additionally, being non-fat and containing less sugar, VITAGEN LESS SUGAR had the advantage of being endorsed by the Health Promotion Board as a healthier choice product. From this head start, MDI brainstormed on the possibilities that might elevate the product's appeal to the current consumer market.

Inspiration struck when the trend towards beauty foods began (Mellentin, 2007), where consumers started to become excited over the possibility of enhancing beauty through one's diet. One ingredient that has been in vogue would be collagen. Undeniably, collagen is one of the crucial factors that keep the skin supple and youthful. As collagen injections are not an attractive option to most people, the next best alternative seemed

"BENEO-Orafti's extended consumer research shows clearly that the consumer is looking for products that can give a sense of wellbeing. Scientific research also provides plenty of evidence that our ingredients improve digestive health. It's simple: when our gut is working well, we feel good. And if you feel good on the inside, it will show on the outside. We are pleased that MDI managed to work out a formula to capitalise on this trend, were able to use Orafti® ingredients to add value to their product, which ultimately shone in the health and beauty sector."

– Mark Tho,  
Marketing Manager – Asia,  
BENEO – Orafti

to be to acquire collagen through their diet. However, it may not be wise to market collagen per se as an elixir for beauty, just as some cosmetic products pledge to be. As consumers become increasingly knowledgeable, they would no longer be taken in by empty promises.

MDI envisaged that it would be more worthwhile to blend collagen in synergy with other functional attributes. Hence it became their strategy to enhance VITAGEN LESS SUGAR, a nutritious probiotic drink, with a feel-good factor that helps consumers feel healthy so as to radiate beauty from beyond skin-deep. On top of its digestive functions, MDI dosed in collagen peptides and floral extracts, such as rosehip, which contributed to the drink's beauty function. The collagen peptides served as components required to synthesize collagen, which is not solely found in our skin, but is also important in the connective tissues, bones and tendons. Furthermore, vitamin C was added as an antioxidant and it is also a vital coenzyme in the biosynthesis of collagen.

The use of floral extracts was a refreshing concept that could help MDI channel the aesthetic appeal of rose to draw their targeted consumers' attention. From a technical viewpoint, the aromatic floral flavour complemented the inherent taste of the collagen peptides, so as to give consumers a fresh and unique sensation.

Merging two mega-trends into one novel product, VITAGEN COLLAGEN was thus created. MDI is delighted over its triumphs and are especially appreciative towards SIFST for nominating VITAGEN COLLAGEN for the 1st IUFOST Global Food Industry Awards 2008, without which, this win would not have been possible.

Theodore Levitt once said, "Creativity is thinking new things. Innovation is doing new things." MDI is always striving to make abstract dreams into reality. In their relentless efforts to develop better and more innovative products, they hope to bring recognition to the food industry of Singapore, from not only within the region but globally as well. **FBA**

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