



All About *Aqua*

By Melissa Kvidahl

Enhanced waters gain popularity as athletes and on-the-go shoppers look for nutrition and hydration.

Last month, Vitaminwater released its latest advertisement starring New York Mets third baseman David Wright along with Mike “The Situation” Sorrentino, star of the reality show “Jersey Shore.” The commercial depicts the two men training together—it shows them lifting weights, running and even some impromptu batting practice against The Situation’s famed abs. Natural product manufacturers might think that this has nothing to do with them, as they pride themselves on creating products set apart from the fickle fanfare of the media and youth trends. However, when it comes to enhanced waters, the audience interested in this

advertisement is the audience that might just skyrocket the latest product to popularity.

“There is a segment of the population who is athletic and will buy the enhanced waters to replenish electrolytes and other nutrients that are lost during a workout or practice,” explained Richard F. Staack, PhD, CEO of SoluBlend Technologies LLC (Frankfort, IL). “The perception is that drinking enhanced water will help your body return to normal quicker than without drinking enhanced waters.”

Of course, like many sports nutrition products (protein powders specifically come to mind here), popularity of the enhanced water category has grown to

include more than just athletes.

“Enhanced waters appeal to a wide range of consumers because there is such a wide range of products that fall into the enhanced water category,” said Michelle Hursong, director of beverage applications at WILD Flavors, Inc. (Erlanger, KY). “Enhanced waters can be zero calorie, low calorie or mid calorie; can have an array of added vitamins, minerals and nutrients; and come in a variety of flavors, from traditional flavors like lemon to exotic fruits like goji or açai.”

As Hursong pointed out, enhanced waters are not just for athletes anymore—they’re for anyone who is looking for a convenient way to control calories, increase nutrient intake and

stay hydrated. According to Lisa Lent, CEO and founder of Vitalah (Watsonville, CA), consumers today are on the go, looking for ease of use and economic solutions to the nutrition challenge. "By choosing enhanced water, they satisfy their need to hydrate and get some nutrients while they're at," she said.

But if you ask Kurt Althof, director of marketing and sales at Coral LLC (Incline Village, NV), many shoppers are drawn to the growing category because of the *perception* of nutrition. "I believe most people feel better about spending money on a beverage that they enjoy if they can have the added value of 'nutrition,'" he said. "It's almost a justification for drinking something other than plain water. Enhanced waters can meet this need or desire by adding any number of nutrients, from vitamins to minerals,

to even enzymes or probiotics. The trouble is, it is difficult to enhance water and retain a positive flavor profile without adding too many negative ingredients, primarily artificial flavors and sweeteners."

Navigating the Challenges

Along with creating a great natural flavor, other hurdles face this category.

"Ingredient selection is a challenge when developing enhanced waters. If the enhanced water is clear and colorless, the ingredient selection will be limited to those that do not impart color," added Hursong.



Image courtesy of WILD Flavors, Inc.

One solution, offered by Staack, is to color the enhanced water—this can open the doors to more ingredients.

Further, said Lent, many waters packaged in plastic containers may lose their efficacy when sitting on the shelf. "This is why Vitalah chooses to deliver Oxylent in a small, convenient packet that you just add water to for on-the-go nutrition that loses none of its efficacy in water," she added.

Yet another challenge meeting manufacturers is that many key functional ingredients are fat- or lipid-soluble and cannot be effectively added to water—and the pool is small for those that can be. "The water-soluble vitamins work fine in enhanced water, but every one of the enhanced water companies can achieve the same product using the same ingredients," said Staack. "There is no difference, or not enough for brand loyalty, so price would be the decision maker if all the parameters are the same." He added that for a new enhanced water to be successful on the market, it would need to differentiate itself from the pack with functional ingredients, other than water-soluble vitamins, and have a health benefit that is "consumer friendly."

But perhaps most troubling, certain vitamins and minerals might add an off taste to functional water—therefore rendering it void of water's "tasteless" quality. In this case, it is critical, said Hursong, that the ingredients remain compatible with the flavor profile of the product. "Ultimately, the success of a beverage largely depends on taste—if it doesn't taste good, people won't buy it," she said. **NIE**

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- Vitalah, (877) OXYLENT
- WILD Flavors, Inc., (859) 342-3600

Mixing Water and Oil Solubles

One of the biggest problems plaguing manufacturers of enhanced water is finding water-soluble ingredients. SoluBlend Technologies has answered this challenge with a new technology that allows manufacturers of beverages (as well as frozen, refrigerated, packaged and baked foods) the ability to formulate healthy products with fat-soluble ingredients converted to water-soluble lipids.

SoluBlend Technologies has released its patented, proprietary technology that allows popular nutraceuticals such as omega-3 fatty acids, phytoosterols, resveratrol, coenzyme Q10 and natural vitamin E to be incorporated into a variety of consumables as water-soluble lipids, opening up

opportunities to provide shelf-stable, value-added foods and beverages.

"Our new technology allows popular heart-healthy, fat-soluble ingredients that were notoriously hard to work in many food and beverage matrices to be added to clear and transparent functional beverages and foods without any adverse impact on clarity, taste, texture or appearance," said Richard Staack, CEO. "Further, manufacturers can take advantage of the volumes of research demonstrating actual health benefit of specific doses by incorporating these actives at those efficacious levels—at cost-effective price per serving."

Staack added that SoluBlend's new technology is expected to have significant lasting impact

in the beverage industry, allowing functional oils to be incorporated into beverages without affecting the actives or their health benefits. The traditional methods of adding oils into water-based products and foods are limited to certain types of opaque beverages and amount to higher costs per serving, he explained.

"Not only does our new technology allow the functional oils to be added to any and all beverages without impacting the finished product, the cost is much lower than that of the other technologies developed for beverages by as much as five times," Staack added.

SoluBlend Technologies, founded in 2009, is presently developing other functional oils for the food and beverage markets, and is the patent holder and manufacturer of this conversion technology.