

antipodean opportunity

STUART JACKSON CONCLUDES HIS SERIES ON THE NATURAL HEALTH INDUSTRY IN NEW ZEALAND.

The final chapter of my New Zealand tour began back in Auckland with an eye-opening call at Nutralife, best known in the UK for the Kordels brand. Having had the experience of visiting many UK manufacturing facilities, it was plain to see that Nutralife operated a state-of-the-art factory offering hard-gel capsules, tablets, vege-caps and powders.

I was amused to find pictures there of industry legend Les Illingworth, driving racing cars complete with a most becoming helmet. Les, New Zealand was not far enough away to keep that a secret! Pictures apart, any suppliers interested in New Zealand production would do well to look to Nutralife.

THE NZ CONFERENCE

Before parting for New Zealand's natural product conference, I encountered a very memorable and lively character in Warwick Lightbourne, who demonstrated his Percutane crème that he developed at the

Cornwall Injury clinic in Auckland. A mix of herbs including Arnica, Capsaicin, Aloe Vera and Burdock, it is used as a massage application for immobility or sports and, along with his Thermastrap range, is now available in the UK.

The conference was held in Nelson, a northern town of South Island, the flight to which granted me some dramatic views of both island's mountainous coastlines.

Most memorable in Nelson was the Carol Priest range of bodycare; skilfully packaged and very natural it is yet to make it to the UK, but look out for its arrival. Already here, Lifestream offers retailers some interesting product options from its supplement range, including the flagship bioactive spirulina, a rich source of iron, protein, GLA, chlorophyll-a, beta-carotene and antioxidants.

Other highlights at Nelson were Forest Herbs skincare, not yet UK-bound, and Nelson Aperies with the well-known brand, Nectar Ease UK heading up its range of

Manuka honey, bee venom and pollen products.

At the conference it was enlightening to discover that our friends across the globe are under similar legislative threat, particularly in their attempts to conquer their Australian neighbours. It is a bonus to UK distributors and retailers to find New Zealand suppliers accustomed to the demands and constraints of trading in a legislative climate.

THE PLAYERS

New Zealand's extraordinarily positive suppliers are led by charismatic personalities with, as I was to discover almost daily, plenty of Scottish ancestry! Leader of the wolf pack was indisputably Trevor Lock of Functional Nutraceuticals who took me to the Crazy Cow Café and then led the band of delegates on a tour of Nelson's pubs. As successful in business as he is animated in person, Trevor's talents are directed to supplements and skin care products based on colostrum. Not always popular with the UK health food retailer or consumer, colostrum products will most likely find their main success in other UK markets.

After a trip to wonderful Christchurch, it was back to Auckland and dinner with Jenny Wheeler, founder of Happy Families. Still to arrive here, this brand had some attractive food supplements, honey and bee venom skincare products for both humans and pets. Happy Families and another brand, Ecopet, were the only two I encountered offering pet care and, like the UK, it's a small but growing market in New Zealand and if it ever truly takes off here, there will be a rush on the limited choice available.

TRIED AND TRUSTED

My last morning was spent with the largest natural product company in New Zealand, Healtheries, and UK-established brand Kiwiherb. Healtheries was founded in 1904 and today its flagship product from a range of 750 health foods, supplements and beverages is, under its UK name, "Seatone". A unique mussel extract, sourced from New Zealand Green Lipped Mussels, it contains a rich blend of natural proteins, minerals, mucopolysaccharides, glucosamine and Omega 3 fatty acids; all naturally occurring compounds known to maintain joint mobility and well being.

When one considers that UK health food retailers and consumers are so much less receptive to shellfish sources than in New Zealand, it is remarkable that Healtheries



SUMMARY

UK retailers are inundated with trade shows, mail shots and visits from brand representatives of both UK- and international-based suppliers. While all should be treated equally, it is worth noting amongst the international offerings those from New Zealand simply because so much of what we need from a new product is already in place. Commercially, it is their willingness to listen, talk and work together that has been so refreshing.

interest in the UK is led by a mussel extract. With so much more to offer I hope that other brands will join Seatone here in the UK and that Healtheries will not use Seatone's market record as a yardstick for placing those new arrivals, which would be suited to the UK health food retailer.

Phil Rasmussen, a medical herbalist, founded Phytomed Medicinal Herbs in 1994 and set about creating a brand of herbal tinctures from native medicinal herbs. Sourced organically wherever possible and all wild-harvested in a sustainable manner, Kiwiherb has already made its mark in the UK. Phil is extremely passionate about Kiwiherb and I was impressed by their ethics and the quality of information supporting the home market retailer.

BACK TO BUSINESS

New Zealand suppliers do bring a few difficulties with them. Their friendly attitude to our competition; and the supermarket, born as it is from a more unified home market, can make them slow to recognise the need to trade solely or separately to the UK independent. Their commitment to shellfish and shark cartilage products, immensely popular across the globe, is not so well received here. Perhaps too, a little too much emphasis is placed on the pristine environment as a selling point at the expense of providing the right deal to retailers.

These problems are small in comparison to those normally encountered with international suppliers, and there is much in New Zealand's favour. The products do appear to be of high quality with fresh, stylish packaging and very natural ingredients. Our markets are more similar than dissimilar, and most of the brands are still privately owned with a will and desire to succeed in the UK.

In a 2002 survey of the New Zealand natural product sector, 89.5% of respondents maintained that most of their future growth will occur in international markets; 17% of companies identified the UK as their number one priority export market and overall, the UK came third after the USA and Australia for target growth. A huge 95% of surveyed companies are either already exporting or planning to export in the future. These statistics reinforce the view that New Zealand suppliers are more committed at a younger age to developing international markets than most other nations.

It was a pleasure to meet so many eager suppliers and all readily provided me with information on New Zealand and its natural product history. I must however, single out Phil from Kiwiherb and Tracey Tangihaere for going that extra mile in supporting me after my visit.



If you have any questions for Talking Shop or would like further information on Stuart Jackson's consultancy service, contact him on 0131 315 0303 or email stuart@forceofnature.co.uk or visit www.forceofnature.co.uk