



Stimulating Trends in Sexual Health

By Michael Schiavetta

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It is a topic on every customer's mind, some more than others, yet important to all. For many, it is a difficult subject to discuss with a retailer. For others, it is a simple matter to bring up. But regardless of how comfortable a customer is with discussing his or her sexual health, there is no denying that seeking natural solutions is yet another reason to visit your store - provided you have the solutions they seek.

With advertisements for pharmaceutical products becoming more prominent on radio, television, and Web sites (as well as unsolicited e-mails), sexual health in the mainstream consumer's eye has never been as accessible. But what are the side effects of these Viagra-like drugs and treatments? Does the Natural Products Industry offer credible alternatives for those seeking a healthy and satisfying sex life? And lastly, what is the sales potential for natural sexual health products in the marketplace?

Like the act of love itself, some of these answers are easy to satisfy, while others need a better understanding of the surrounding territory. According to a 2002 report by *Nutrition Business Journal* (www.nutritionbusiness.com), exact sales figures on the sexual health market can be difficult to ascertain, given the incredibly personal nature of the subject. Many consumers would rather purchase such products through the Internet or over the telephone than endure a potentially embarrassing conversation with an actual store clerk. But the report also notes that one thing is certain, and that is, sex sells.

"This segment of the Natural Products Industry is a rapidly growing market," says Martin G. Crosby, R. Ph., president and chief scientific officer of QualiLife Pharmaceuticals Inc. of Charleston, S.C. "However, it would experience far greater growth if standard scientific validation measures were adopted to increase scientific credibility, thereby allowing broader health care professional acceptance that would translate into greater consumer confidence and sales of 'meaningful products.'"

Zestra from QualiLife Pharmaceuticals Inc. is made from all-natural botanical ingredients that contain bioactive properties from selected plants. According to the company, it has been clinically proven in double-blind, placebo controlled crossover clinical trials to increase female sexual pleasure in normal women. The massage oil is designed to be applied topically and massaged onto the clitoris and labia during foreplay. QualiLife notes the effects usually begin three to five minutes after applications, and last about 45 minutes for most women. Zestra has been involved in research and development since 1997, with an initial consumer testing phase accomplished over a four-year period involving hundreds of couples and more than 200 formulation evaluations and refinements, adds the company.

A GROWING SENSATION

Experts generally agree that sales will increase as awareness of sexual health conditions increase. "As individuals, men and women, continue to learn more and more about sexual dysfunction and how to effectively manage it, this sector of the Natural Products Industry will only continue to grow," says Ormstein. "As side effects from mainstream pharmaceutical remedies are publicized, consumers will most likely explore natural solutions."

Certainly, this statement alone should be enough to arouse the interest of any natural health retailer.