

BIG BOOK OF NPD SECRETS



The Best
Advice from
Leading
Innovation
Experts

Big Book of NPD Secrets

The Best Advice from Leading Innovation Experts

TraceGains CEO Gary Nowacki connects with CPG innovators on his Conception to Consumption (CtoC) podcast. Amid ongoing disruption, changing buying channels, and shifting consumer preferences, the unabated demand for food, beverage, and supplements companies to bring new products to market holds steady. We've curated the top advice from the leaders in brand, product, and innovation revealed during these discussions to share proven techniques to improve your product development program.

CtoC Podcast

Conception to Consumption (CtoC) is a monthly podcast featuring conversations with some of the brightest minds in CPG innovation. Guests discuss their victories, setbacks, and proven strategies for product development success. They also share insight on the latest consumer trends and emerging market segments to help listeners achieve better, faster product development. Listen to all CtoC podcasts featured in this eBook [here](#).

Gary Nowacki | TraceGains CEO

Gary Nowacki is the CEO of TraceGains, a global technology company providing networked innovation, quality, and compliance solutions to consumer brands that want to reduce supply chain risk, take control of data, and go faster. Before TraceGains, Gary held several executive positions in the technology industry across enterprise resource planning, supply chain management, and quality assurance within the CPG segment.



Table of Contents

- 04 Embrace Changing Demographics**
Riana Lynn, *Founder and CEO*
Journey Foods
- 05 You Have to Know What You Want**
Eric Kiker, *Chief Differentiable Officer*
The Digestible Brand
- 06 The Real Target Market for CBD**
Justin Singer, *Co-Founder and CEO*
Caliper Holdings
- 07 Prepare for the “New Normal” Now**
Barb Stuckey, *President and Chief Innovation Officer*
Mattson
- 08 Learn From Failure**
Greg Grisanti, *CEO*
Kettle Cuisine
- 09 Start with Retailers and Distributors Will Follow**
Barry Nalebuff, *Co-Founder and CEO*
Honest Tea
- 10 There's Potential in the Impossible**
Suzie Yorke, *CEO*
Love Good Fats
- 11 CBD is Here to Stay**
Loren Israelsen, *Founder and President*
United Natural Products Association (UNPA)
- 12 Do Your Homework**
Nick Landry, *Culinary Development Chef*
Summit Hills Food
- 13 Put a Millennial Spin On It**
Sebastian Nava, *Product Manager*
Amazon
- 14 Curiosity Drives Innovation**
Eliana Pinilla-Ryhal, *VP of Research and Innovation*
RXBAR
- 15 Do Good**
GT Dave, *Founder and CEO*
GT's Living Foods
- 16 Start with the End in Mind**
Kimberly Schaub, *Certified Culinary Chef and Senior Product Development Scientist*
PeasOnMoss Podcast
- 17 Create a Unique Experience**
Rob Laing, *Founder and CEO*
Farm.One
- 18 Make the Most of Both Worlds**
Adam Yee, *Co-Founder*
The Better Meat Co.
- 19 Change is Good**
Paul Neumann, *VP of Research & Development*
Califia Farms
- 20 Make Sustainable Choices Easy**
David Benzaquen, *Co-Founder and Chairman*
Ocean Hugger Foods
- 21 Get Out in Front of Customer Needs**
Greg Kean, *VP of Innovation & Product Development*
WellPet
- 22 Include the Consumer**
Kim Essex, *Partner and Managing Director*
Ketchum
- 23 Take Big Swings**
Dean Eberhardt, *Co-Founder and CEO*
HopLark HopTea

Embrace Changing Demographics

Food must become more inclusive.

“Almost every group of consumers now demands more transparency, healthier food, and cleaner ingredients. Finding cost-effective clean ingredients that can replace traditional staples is a big trend - but building on that trend is the idea of greater cultural inclusion for our manufacturers and our consumers.”

“It’s something I’ve seen more and more and have been blogging about quite a bit since last summer.

“This trend is simply reflecting the fact that we are experiencing dramatic shifts in demographics. Generation Z and Millennials have more purchasing power, and Black and Latinx populations are driving sales in their communities and online, which is influencing the greater economy.

“This demographic shift empowers newer innovators, including start-ups founded by women, immigrants, and minorities from all different communities and backgrounds. We’re seeing Black entrepreneurs and leaders driving more trends for start-ups and

established companies as they demand inclusivity and more seats at the table. So, this growing cultural inclusion in our food is a trend that will only grow, and companies that embrace these new voices will see the benefits.”

About Riana

Riana Lynn is the Founder and CEO of Journey Foods, a food tech company that supports cutting-edge product management and data services to help companies better feed the planet’s 8 billion people. As a biologist turned serial entrepreneur, she’s found success developing high-growth, internationally recognized technology and food businesses with a great community of supporters.



Riana Lynn
Founder and CEO
Journey Foods



NPD SECRET NO. 2:

You Have to Know What You Want

Why do some food and CPG companies struggle to innovate?

“I don’t think they understand people. They don’t know what their customers want. The biggest hurdle to understanding what people want is knowing what you want yourself.”

“I owe this discovery to Odwalla, which was the 800-pound gorilla in the natural juice segment. But Odwalla put sugar or preservatives in half their SKUs. I was working with Naked Juice, and we would say, ‘All we add is a bottle and a lid,’ and that was the truth. This thinking helped us develop a great brand position for Naked Juice, which was ‘nothing to hide.’ It was about something functional, but it quickly became emotional.

“We could tell people, ‘Hey, you should have nothing to hide, you should show your vulnerabilities, and you should show your passions, and you should grab a Naked Juice and go out and show the world who you are.’ I believe leading with the

functional and turning it into something emotional is what helped that brand move across the country so quickly. In 18 months, Naked Juice went from essentially a Southern California brand to a national brand acquired by Pepsi. That’s fast. Figuring out what your consumers want and knowing what you want is the key to innovation.”

About Eric

After a career as a writer and creative director, Eric pivoted to messaging strategist. He’s helped household brand names like Naked Juice, Perfect Bar, Atkins, Jenny Craig, Curves, KC Masterpiece, Herbalife, PIVOT Foundation, Stinkbug Naturals, and K&G Petroleum (the country’s largest 7-11 franchisee).

Eric Kiker
Chief Differentiable Officer
The Digestible Brand



The Real Target Market for CBD

Who should companies target for CBD-related products?

“We try to remind people all the time this is a decent industry that’s lacking the infrastructure they’re used to in food. And it’s really important to pay attention to how it’s being built and to get it built up carefully and in a way that can scale as people start getting into it.”

“The fad is angsty millennials on the coasts: The idea that this is going to reduce your anxiety and provide overall wellness. It probably does. Frankly, I don’t think we have enough research to fully say that with 100% confidence, but we have a lot of indications that it probably is true but that’s still not the trend. It’s really about making aging suck less.

“The center of gravity for CBD three to five years from now will be Boca Raton, Florida. It’s going to be middle America, people who’ve spent their lives on their feet or working and now suffer generalized aches and pains. It’ll be fascinating to see what happens when CPG manufacturers with real food scientists, packaging expertise, care for substantiation, and marketing engines get into this space and start bringing their product development expertise to bear.”

About Justin

Justin Singer is the CEO and Co-founder of Caliper Foods – a pioneering company in the CBD industry, and parent company of Caliper Consumer Ingredients and Caliper Consumer Goods. Justin is also the Co-founder of Stillwater Brands, where he first developed Caliper’s soluble cannabinoid technology.



Justin Singer
Co-Founder and CEO
Caliper Holdings



NPD SECRET NO. 4:

Prepare for the “New Normal” Now

If you're not thinking about tomorrow now, you're behind.

“We found out from our consumer studies that 58% of respondents said that when things return to normal – when grocery and cooking habits go back to the way they were before the shelter-in-place restrictions – they’ll want to buy innovative new products immediately.”

“You can understand why - people have been cooking and eating the same thing for months. They’re going to be in the grocery stores looking for what’s new, what’s exciting, what’s going to give their families something they haven’t been able to experience while they’ve been stuck at home.

“We’re encouraging companies to get that innovation engine going again now. We can tell retail grocery buyers will be overwhelmed with new products. During the shutdowns, it was tough to get those meetings to try and sell a new product. So,

when things start to let up, there’s going to be this backlog of new developments in the hopper that everyone’s trying to get on store shelves. If you’re not already teed up and ready to go with new products, you’re going to be way behind the competition.”

About Barb

Barb has been at Mattson since 1997. As President and Chief Innovation Officer, she oversees strategy, insights, and innovation, along with business development and trend tracking. Barb is a well-known expert in food trends, taste, and the business of food development.

Barb Stuckey

*President and Chief Innovation Officer
Mattson*

Learn from Failure

Don't be afraid to try something new.

“For every success, I get 10 failures. There are all kinds of failures where you try things to a point where you think it's not going to work, but you have to know when to stick with it. You have to keep at it and not give up until you figure it out.”

“I can go on and on about what we've tried and failed at. If you were to look at the broad CPG industry, there was a study done that over four years from new product introduction, only one out of four products was still on the shelf after four years. The other three were failures. But there are no pure failures, in my opinion, and by that, I mean a pure failure is something that literally crashes your company. That's a pure failure. I just don't see those out there.

“What I'm trying to say simply is, don't be afraid to try something new. Don't be afraid to try things but know when it gets too funky. Everything you do, you learn from.”

About Greg

Greg Grisanti is a highly accomplished and creative culinary, technical, and sales chef who excels at many facets of the food industry, filling roles such as Culinary Sales, Corporate Development R&D Chef. Greg possesses extensive knowledge regarding the formulation of recipes, scale-ups, and plant formula runs, including multiple types of processing and packaging equipment, including sous vide. Greg's also one of 152 professionals to earn the CRC (Certified Research Chef) distinction globally.



Greg Grisanti
CEO
Kettle Cuisine



Barry Nalebuff
Co-Founder and CEO
Honest Tea

NPD SECRET NO. 6:

Start with Retailers and Distributors Will Follow

How can brands find distributors for new products?

“Many products aren’t ideal for Internet sales, particularly glass bottles with liquid in them, so brick and mortar retail is necessary. Bottles are hard to transport. And people running distribution businesses tend to be bottom-line driven. They’re focused on making money.”

“It’s a little bit of a chicken-and-egg problem because until they see the product move, they’re not going to want to offer it. But it’s not going to sell until it’s available on store shelves. Trying to find a distributor who believes in you is challenging but crucial.

“Early on, we spent too much effort trying to attract distributors and not enough time on retailers. It turns out distributors care a lot more about what the stores have to say than what a brand does. When the store says jump, distributors will ask, ‘How high?’ If you convince a store to want your products, distributors will soon follow. Start with retail stores, get them excited about

your products, offer them free trials, sampling coupons, advertising, whatever it takes to get into the store and have them help you find the right distributor.”

About Barry

Barry Nalebuff is a Milton Steinbach Professor of Management at Yale School of Management and an author specializing in business strategy and game theory. His books include “Thinking Strategically” and “The Art of Strategy.” He has a semi-regular column in Forbes with Ian Ayres called “Why Not?” Nalebuff also has multiple entrepreneurial ventures and is Co-Founder and CEO of Honest Tea and Kombrewcha.

There's Potential in the Impossible

There's white space out there - find it.

“As keto diets started to take off, I took a leap of faith and decided to promote good fats and low sugar. Today, you have anywhere from 30% to 80% of consumers trying to eat better. But we still have a massive issue with obesity. It's beyond an epidemic. Our kids' lifespans are shorter than ours. It's a monumental problem.”

“So we decided to do something no one's done before, which is to load a bar with a lot of good fats and take out all the sugar. It took me a year-and-a-half to figure out how to get the bar to hold together because, unfortunately, sugar is one of the best binding agents out there - all the bars on the market are held together with sugar. I was told repeatedly by multiple labs and co-packers that it wasn't possible.

“But because it had been deemed 'impossible,' there was a space to innovate. We created a high-fat bar that is flavorful and healthy. You don't need the sugar when

you have the right fat, fibers, and protein levels. Consumers are always complaining about the taste of energy bars - so they naturally gravitate to something new that tastes good and is healthy.”

About Suzie

Suzie Yorke is the CEO of Love Good Fats, a pioneer in good fat, low-sugar keto snacks. She spent the last three years researching nutrition and uncovering misinformation about sugar and fats, which led her to create a delicious line of snacks so people can eat and enjoy good fats on the go.



Suzie Yorke
CEO
Love Good Fats

CBD is Here to Stay

Is CBD here to stay, or is it a fad?

“I believe CBD is a durable long-term trend. And here are my reasons...”

“First, we have congressional action through the Farm Bill, that indicates congressional interest in creating a lawful pathway for hemp extract products. Second, we have the legitimacy of CBD as an FDA-approved prescription drug. That suggests there is clinical research that demonstrates CBD has therapeutic benefits. Other indicators are the agricultural sector is heavily investing in transitioning to hemp production. And the USDA is providing guidance to farmers on how to plant what seeds to use and so on.

“We’ve also watched the FDA take considerable interest in and is striving to develop a regulatory pathway. They’ve made it clear they’re looking for safety information on which to enact a judgment on if CBD can be sold as a consumer product.

“I think we can also point to the very practical matter that CBD and hemp extract are a tremendous tax revenue base for many states. And that suggests there’s an incentive on the part of local governments and state and municipal entities to try to responsibly develop both the agricultural base as well as a consumer base that would generate tax revenues for taxing authorities.”

About Loren

Loren is the Founder and President of the United Natural Products Alliance (UNPA), an international trade association of dietary supplements companies committed to safety, science, and quality. He’s been deeply involved in the commercial and regulatory issues facing the global dietary supplement industry since 1980. On the commercial side, he served as General Counsel and President of Nature’s Way Products Inc.

Loren Israelsen

Founder and President

United Natural Products Association (UNPA)

Do Your Homework

To create the trends, you have to get out into the market.

“The easy part is being a follower. The hard part is being an innovator who breaks through with something new.”

“It blows my mind how fast the food industry is changing, it’s crazy, but you have to keep up. We do many dine arounds with customers, ideations, and touring food cities. We pick the trendier cities, especially those with smaller food chains that are in test markets. On the West Coast, the big trendy food city is Los Angeles. A lot of small restaurants start in L.A. and grow, and you’ve also got New York and Chicago, so the bigger cities. But you also see food halls all over the place now. Whoever came up with that idea is a genius.

“People who want to open a restaurant and have something unique but can’t pay the brick-and-mortar premium space can rent out a place for a year to establish their name and move into a restaurant later. It’s looking at all these factors to discover the concepts and trends in the market to develop your breakthrough idea. When we find a trend or flavor profile at a restaurant that we like, we go back to the drawing board. As an R&D Chef, you’re thinking about revenue, you’re

thinking about marketing, you’re thinking about culinary, and you have to back it up with concrete data. We use sources like Data Central and Technomic to determine the scale of the trend and whether it’s going to be here for the next year or the next ten.”

About Nick

Chef Nick Landry graduated from Nicholls State University in 2005. While at the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute, Landry had the opportunity to study abroad at the Ritz Carlton in St. Thomas.

After graduation, Landry worked at the Westchester Country Club and Bruce Food Corp. and worked with chefs from countries worldwide. Landry has earned several awards, including Best Chefs of America 2013, second place in the Professional Culinology Competition. Landry is now the Culinary Development Chef at Southeastern Mills.



Nick Landry
Culinary Development Chef
Summit Hills Food

Put a Millennial Spin on It

How do you attract Millennials to a brand?

“Millennials want to be introduced to new experiences, flavors, textures and formats, but you can only go so far before you’ve completely lost them. So, it’s an evolution, not revolution.”

“That means bring in something unique – whether it’s a new flavor profile or form factor – to an existing form. You could create a new bread product and say, ‘This will be sandwich bread, but we’re going to season it with Moroccan spice.’ So, you have a unique flavor profile but a familiar form. It’s all about pairing something exotic with something familiar to appeal to the millennial consumer. If you say okay, we’re going to make a Moroccan spice puff bread, what is that?

“Now, you’ve lost your consumer because you’ve gone too far. And even if the Moroccan spice is a little far out there, you’re balancing it with sandwich bread familiarity.”

“Millennials want a reliable source, food that’s culinary-minded, someone behind the product with a chef background or a brand representing something they know and love. It’s a brand that they know and trust, but they’re getting something experimental on top of that.”

About Sebastian

Sebastian worked as an associate food editor in “America’s Test Kitchen” and a food consultant before heading west to Boulder, Colorado, to help drive new trends as R&D Culinary Manager at Boulder Brands. He played a crucial role in converting concepts into viable commercial products. Today, he’s the Product Manager for Culinary at Amazon, spearheading RTE project development.

Sebastian Nava

Product Manager
Amazon

Curiosity Drives Innovation

What does it take to be a great product designer?

“For innovation to happen, you have to adopt the mindset of a learner. It’s also tied to humility. It’s knowing you don’t know everything.”

“Having a learning disposition built into you, being willing to stand corrected and being focused on doing what’s right for the customer and the company is essential. All of these characteristics stem from being a continuous learner and questioning everything constantly. You need a curious mind. You must have these three things to succeed in product design: courageous curiosity, humility, and a consumer-centric approach. It just makes you a better innovator and a better collaborator because great ideas don’t happen in a silo. By challenging your own beliefs, the stronger your proposition becomes for the consumer.

“I saw an IFT food documentary once and one of the journalists asked a question throughout” ‘When was the last time that you changed your mind on something?’ It’s a hard thing to do. I think about it that way. You don’t have to be 100% about everything but you need the ability to look at the other end of the equation.”

About Eliana

Eliana Pinilla-Ryhal is VP of Research and Innovation at RXBAR, a clean label food manufacturer. Pinilla-Ryhal's experience includes serving in functional areas of food categories such as quality, product development, and process engineering.



Eliana Pinilla-Ryhal
VP of Research and Innovation
RXBAR

Do Good

Do what you love, and don't take shortcuts.

“For any innovators hoping to launch a successful CPG business, I have three basic pieces of advice: number one, do what you love.”

“What I mean by that is you need to do something you're genuinely enamored with, and not just because you think it's cool or people will like it. Something that you live and breathe.

“Number two is you must make something that makes the world a better place and improves people's lives because gone are the days where people make whimsical stuff. If you want long-term success and to stand out from the crowd, you need to do something that's significantly changing the world for the better and improving people's lives.

“And number three is to keep it simple and go down a slow and steady path. If it were easy, someone would have done it by now. So, if you stay on that simple and slow and steady path when challenges come your way, you have the strength to weather that storm.”

About GT

GT Dave is an American businessman and the Founder and CEO of GT's Living Foods. In the late 1990s, he was the first to put kombucha on store shelves. His company commands 40% of the U.S. kombucha market.

GT Dave

Founder and CEO
GT's Living Foods

Start with the End in Mind

What slows down new product development?

“Start with the end in mind: the claims, the challenges you might face, and address them as early as possible.”

“So, for example, if you need a particular ingredient that’s sourced only from one country and one minuscule part of that country, recognize that’s your limiting factor. You can’t manufacture past amounts of ingredients available. A few supply chain tricks can help, such as buying in advance, having suppliers commit to specific volumes, and verifying the supplier’s production capacity. That’s probably the biggest challenge that causes problems later is you have a solid formula, but now you have an ingredient you can’t buy anymore. Then, you have to reformulate. And that’s heartbreaking.

“I have those conversations upfront with our suppliers. It’s vital to have close relationships with an extensive network of suppliers. And a program with access to enough details that you can quickly decide if a supplier is a good

fit for your business or not. And it’s important never to burn a bridge in that network. Those relationships, even relationships that aren’t the best, matter. That’s another key to success for effective product development and for products to survive in the marketplace.”

About Kimberly

Kimberly is a Certified Culinary Chef and Senior Product Development who worked most recently with Bulletproof 360, a company that produces coffee and tea products. Today, Kimberly is the creator and host of the PeasOnMoss podcast, which follows her journey from a nutritionist to cook to product developer while also looking at the food product development process and those involved.



Kimberly Schaub
*Certified Culinary Chef and
Senior Product Development Scientist
PeasOnMoss Podcast*



NPD SECRET NO. 14:

Create a Unique Experience

Consumers Want Fresh Global Flavors

“We don’t take anything for granted. We’re growing indoors in a small space in a city, using technology that hasn’t been around very long. There isn’t a textbook we can refer to. It’s mostly figuring things out from scratch.”

“Sometimes that’s really hard and it causes us to go down dead ends. But other times it means we can come up with better solutions. There are things we can do because we’re starting anew. And that informs our mission: We’re here to grow the kind of things chefs want, but they have trouble getting. We’re doing that in the heart of the city. We say ‘local, rare, and fresh all year.’

“This isn’t just a production facility. This is someplace people love to visit. We do tours, classes, and events. This is a way for people to experience the farm and taste all these different flavors. There’s a delight element to our business, where we want to show people how amazing this produce is and give them contact with a farm. Most of the time they don’t get to visit farms, they’re too far away

and so mysterious. When you buy kale from Whole Foods, often it’s from hundreds or thousands of miles away. And we don’t know what condition it was grown. So, having vertical farms in the city that people can visit is powerful.”

About Rob

Rob Laing is the Founder and CEO of Farm.One. He began his entrepreneurial journey when he founded the translation tech startup, Gengo.com in 2008 in Tokyo. After a transformative experience around whole plant food, he decided to launch Farm.One to source specialty herbs, edible flowers, and microgreens year-round to chefs, using hydroponic farm technology. Farm.One makes it possible for restaurants to serve farm-fresh food in the city.

Rob Laing
Founder and CEO
Farm.One

Make the Most of Both Worlds

When it comes to meat and meat alternatives, does it need to be so black and white?

“We make plant-based solutions that can be blended into meat. When we reduce meat by 30% to 50% per SKU, it improves the taste, texture, and nutritional profile of our products.”

“Tackling this market could have a lot of potential because plant-based meat only has about a 1% share of the market. By blending meat with plant-based ingredients, we can carve out a bigger piece of the pie, especially with a B2B model and taking on larger meat companies. We have a better chance of creating a bigger impact. That's the basis of the company: we can make a bigger impact by taking a blended approach to reducing meat.

“Blending is a topic that wasn't well explored. From the consumer's point of view, they're reading studies that show we're probably eating too much meat and people want to reduce their meat consumption. I'm talking about flexitarians, people who want to cut back on their meat consumption.”

About Adam

Adam Yee is a food science professional who loves food science so much, he started a podcast about it called “My Food Job Rocks.” He is valued for his communication skills and have spoke in multiple conferences such as the Cultured Meat Symposium, Institute of Food Technologist Expo (IFT), International Association for Food Protection, and was asked to present to several colleges including Cal Poly SLO, UC Davis, Ohio State, and North Carolina State University.

He also co-founded The Better Meat Co., a B2B company that produces next-generation plant-based proteins for foodservice providers and meat processors. Their plant-based proteins blend seamlessly into ground meat products, enabling major food users to enhance the taste of their products while improving both health and sustainability, all in a cost-competitive way.



Adam Yee
Co-Founder
The Better Meat Co.



Paul Neumann
VP of Research & Development
Califia Farms

NPD SECRET NO. 16:

Change is Good

How to stay on top in a highly competitive market.

“I look for people who are agile and nimble and ready to pivot when they see change coming. It’s important it doesn’t bother them or hold them back when they can’t finish what they started because we’re moving onto something better.”

“That’s a vital characteristic that I seek, people that embrace change. We’re in a very entrepreneurial space, with new competitors popping up daily trying to take our market share. How do we generate ideas that will maintain our success in the marketplace? The answer lies in having continuous learners who always think about new ways to do things and aren’t afraid to try new things. To compress product development timeframes, it’s all about trusting your gut and being able to pivot quickly. If you change direction, it doesn’t mean you can’t revisit that work in the future. But it’s important not to let it slow you down.

“While speed is crucial, you can never sacrifice quality or taste for the sake of being first to market with something that’s trendy at the moment. You’ve got to be unrelenting about making sure you’re delivering what consumers will love.”

About Paul

Paul Neumann is the Vice President of Research and Development of Califia Farms. The company is on a mission to inspire and nourish the world with the wisdom of a plant-based lifestyle. Califia Farms is one of the fastest-growing natural beverage companies in the United States and the leading brand in the natural products plant-based milk category.

Make Sustainable Choices Easy

How can the food industry create a healthier, more sustainable future?

“As we think about how we market, message, and speak to consumers, we need to respect them. We should engage with them and support them by offering products that make the right choice easy and desirable rather than an obligation.”

“We need to be open-minded and collaborative with the traditional food industry, which has undergone significant changes. Many of the challenges we see today in our public health system are the result of poor product marketing and consumer diet choices. Food companies have a noble mission to feed people. They have resources, distribution networks, food science expertise, and other things that have taken decades to develop.

“We have the opportunity to collaborate within the food industry to feed the masses in ways that ensure the food of tomorrow is healthier, more sustainable, and more ethical. The biggest challenge stems from marketing, and I say this as a marketing guy is sometimes we’re so stuck thinking about consumers, we forget we’re consumers ourselves. What drives our purchase decisions? We’re all motivated

by taste, health, and convenience. We need to focus on those priorities as if we’re sitting down to eat. What would we want?”

About David

David Benzaquen is the Founder and CEO of PlantBased Solutions, an award-winning, mission-driven, strategic brand management and marketing agency for plant-based consumer products. The company helps brands launch and grow their businesses through marketing, branding, and fundraising.

In addition to PlantBased Solutions, David is Co-Founder and Chairman of Ocean Hugger Foods, a company building sustainable alternatives to popular seafood items. David received his master’s degree in management from The New School and his bachelor’s in political science from American University.



David Benzaquen
Co-Founder and Chairman
Ocean Hugger Foods

Get Out in Front of Customer Needs

How do companies introduce the right products at the right time?

“We’re known as one of the companies that have brought a lot of innovation to the natural pet food space. Our goal has been to have consumers join us on this journey. As they evolve, we’re studying their pain points and needs, so we can offer the right products at the right time.”

“Our freeze-dried kibble product is an excellent example of something from our recent past, where we uncovered the consumer need for real meat and visible textures. We invested in manufacturing assets at the ideal time, allowing us to make the product in our existing facility, which was a feat due to the different densities of ingredients.

“By collecting insights and conducting research, you get closer to the consumer. We always want to be prepared to fulfill solutions for what’s most important to them and their pets. Using customer insight to drive innovation keeps organizations from becoming too comfortable or complacent. But there should also be questions about

whether we’re trying to do too much, or if we’ve gone too far. I want to have those debates, it’s important to have some tension and discomfort to continue to strive.”

About Greg

Greg Kean is the Vice President of Innovation and Product Development at WellPet. Having studied food and nutrition, Greg has a deep appreciation for the relationship between what we consume and our body’s chemistry and firmly believes the same principles hold for our pets. He takes great pride in developing natural foods that provide dogs and cats the sustenance they need to live happy healthy lives.



Greg Kean

VP of Innovation & Product Development
WellPet



Include the Consumer

Consumers are the arbiter of everything we do in food.

“Classically, what we do in food development is solve problems. Every day, every product faces challenges, and I’m continually in awe of how we can solve them. But we’re going to come up with the wrong solutions if we don’t put a consumer lens on everything we do right from the start.”

“The road to successful food launches is littered with failures that consumers have rejected. We get our products all the way to market, and the shopper looks at it and says, ‘Nope, I’m not interested.’ Many of the best ideas have failed to take hold because we haven’t included consumers in the development journey. We need to introduce them to the concepts and technologies before blindsiding them in stores.

“Before introducing anything in the food space, we need to get consumers’ buy-in. They know what they want - we need to listen and then lead. Today’s communication system is too volatile not to plan ahead of time and involve consumers early.”

About Kim

Kim Essex is a Partner and Managing Director of Ketchum’s Food Agriculture & Ingredient industry group, a global communications consultancy. She loves all things food – from the farms it’s grown or raised on to her favorite spot, her kitchen. She has helped food producers and food makers tell their stories for the better part of her 30-year career.



Kim Essex

*Partner and Managing Director
Ketchum*



Dean Eberhardt

Co-Founder and CEO
HopTea

NPD SECRET NO. 20:

Take Big Swings

How can the food industry create a healthier, more sustainable future?

“My M.O. in life is if everyone’s going left, that’s just an incredible opportunity to go right as fast as humanly possible. But you have to do the research. We set out to study the market and find the gaps, launch a prototype, and get candid feedback to finetune and refine.”

“When we launched our product at a Denver farmer’s market back in the summer of 2018, we closely watched people’s faces and their whole body’s response to sipping our tea. We had several similar interactions with people, either telling us it’s the best thing they ever had and or they’d spit it out on the sidewalk. It was always a passionate response.

“Not being ‘vanilla’ and having a solid perspective, both in our brand and in its flavor, was the path to success for us. By having a standout, sometimes divisive product, we’ve created avid fans. I’ll give you an example - our most shared photo on Instagram is what we call the ‘steering wheel shot.’ It’s a customer who just bought our product at Whole Foods, and they’re so excited to share it that they can’t wait to

get home. Take big swings, and have your product be exceptional, even if it’s not for everyone - you’ll find a market that loves it.”

About Dean

HopTea Co-founder and CEO Dean Eberhardt developed the idea of beer-tasting drinks without the alcohol. While doing a 30-day cleanse, Eberhardt went to a brewery to meet a friend, smelled the thick hop taste of a double IPA, and decided he needed the flavor, but not the alcoholic impact. He developed a beverage made with whole tea leaves and hops and launched it in 2018 at the South Pearl Street Farmers Market in Denver. He sold out of his first batch of cans just one week later and had a contract by September to sell his beer in local Whole Foods Market stores.

TraceGains Networked Product Development Suite

TraceGains orchestrates product development from concept through production, accelerating research, recipe iteration, claims verification, and change management. The recent release of Formula Management completes the TraceGains Networked Product Development Suite.

The combined solution allows teams to go from manual processes to automated results by digitizing and streamlining new development for better, faster innovation. A centralized location provides a unified view of all current, variant, and past product formula and recipe information, documentation, and processes across your business and throughout your supply chain—no matter how dispersed or complex.



About TraceGains

Founded in 2008, TraceGains connects people and information so teams can work smarter. As a global technology company, we provide networked innovation, quality, and compliance solutions to consumer brands that want to reduce supply chain risk, speed up business processes, and take control of data. On average, companies find 80% of their suppliers already on TraceGains Network, allowing them to connect and collaborate instantly.

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