



Functional foods and beverages, environmentally friendly products to top 2009 launches

by Hilary Oliver

Beauty foods and drinks, detox products and environmentally conscious items will lead product launches in 2009, according to Datamonitor's Product Launch Analytics, released today. Healthy nut- and seed-based snacks, steam-in-the-bag vegetables, drinks for relaxation and flower-flavored beverages were also top predictions.

Other trends tapped for success were stevia-based sweeteners and products touting brainpower-boosting ingredients. "What we are seeing is an increasing sophistication for functional food and drink trends," said Tom Vierhile, director of Product Launch Analytics. "We now see this trend moving into new areas like brain health and also beauty health."

These sophisticated new products will bring an opportunity for retailers to build their role as educators. "Product makers are counting on consumers to understand some labeling nuances that may be over their collective heads. DHA, for instance, has proven to be a popular addition to product labels, but my guess is that few consumers understand what it is," Vierhile said.

Many of the new product launches will be intuitive fits for naturals retailers, as manufacturers continue fill out their green product lineups. "One surprise that may play out in 2009 is that 'green' may have more staying power than people might think," Vierhile said. "That's because some of the newer 'green' [efforts] dovetail nicely with company desires to keep costs down."

But Vierhile said he was amazed he hasn't seen manufacturers push value with their new launches. "I think the speed of the economic downturn has caught everyone by surprise and there has been a big preoccupation with issues like higher packaging costs and ingredient commodity costs."