

Advice to the Lab Lorn

"Advice to the Lab Lorn" is intended to offer advice, or maybe just solace, for confusing, challenging or downright murderous issues facing SCC members in their labs. Send us your questions at lablorn@caliscc.org and we'll track down an authority or two and get back to you in the Cosmegram. You can include your name if you wish, but we won't publish it for all to see! Your secrets are safe with us.

John Garruto & Rebecca James Gadberry

2. Our marketing department keeps giving us the directive to "use only natural ingredients" as part of the specifications for new product development. Even though we've tried to explain it isn't possible to have an all "natural" product, especially with some of the other parameters in their specs, they still insist on "only natural". Do you have any suggestions as to how we can provide a good product within their pricing and performance parameters and still meet their demand for "natural"?

A. Sounds like it's time for the R&D and marketing groups in your company to sit down and create a definition of natural that's acceptable to you both. Even though you've explained to them that it isn't possible to have an all-natural product, your marketing people may not understand why this is so. On the other hand, it doesn't sound like marketing has explained what they mean by "natural". Since it isn't defined by law, and isn't a term of science, "natural" has as many meanings as the people who use the word. So what you think is natural and what they think is natural may be - and probably is - very different. You have a great opportunity here to create a definition that is acceptable to both groups. Companies who have done so become stronger competitors because the natural message is consistent from the product ingredient list to the marketing message, and is usually quotable by anyone working within the company.

Arriving at a definition is hard work, and may challenge the ethics of individuals in both groups at some point. We would suggest that you begin by having the two groups create a list of what natural means to them, and then get together to present each side's results. You may want to identify the areas of commonality between the two and go from there. Problematic issues will arise on both sides: R&D will be concerned with such things as product instability, short shelf-life, poor product esthetics and the high price of natural formulations, while marketing may veto any ingredient that sounds like a chemical - regardless of whether or not it comes from nature. Everyone should be willing to negotiate their positions and keep an open mind regarding the points made by others in the group. Don't expect to arrive at a definition after only one meeting. Because this is such a passionate subject, and much is riding on the outcome, it may take several tries to get it right. After you have done so, get some feedback from other people in the company, and some consumers, too.

A couple of definitions that have been used by various companies are: 1) Natural ingredients are derived directly from natural sources, using minimal processing and maintaining the natural molecular bonds found in nature; 2) natural ingredients are only ___ steps removed from their natural source (fill in the blank with a number). Some companies, in lieu of defining natural, have identified a list of ingredients they will not use in their products. This list is adhered to by R&D and published to the company's consumers. Whatever you do, try to keep the definition short, since others in the company will most likely repeat it, including sales people. If your definition uses the word "organic", you'll want to check federal and state definitions of the word and related regulations.

Some other tips:

- Before taking any formula to the bench, run the ingredient list by marketing. It's best to find out if an ingredient isn't acceptable before spending time and effort on perfecting the formula. If price parameters haven't been established, you'll want to check if the formula price is acceptable, too.
- Allow time in the development schedule for several submissions. The likelihood of creating an acceptable product on the first or second round is less likely than when natural isn't a concern.

ASK THE EXPERTS DISCLAIMER:

The California Chapter of the Society of Cosmetic Chemists specifically disclaims all and any liability to readers of this column for loss or damage of any nature whatsoever and however arising, whether due to inaccuracy, error, omission or any other cause, whether on the part of the authors of this column or the editor of the Cosmegram or agents, or any other person, due to the use of the information herein. Without any recourse being available whatsoever to any readers in this event.

This written cosmetic advice column may include inaccuracies or errors. The Society of Cosmetic Chemists and its chapters do not under any circumstances accept responsibility for the accuracy or otherwise any response to readers questions in any of California chapter's Cosmegram editions.

All users are advised to check advice given in the column carefully before entering into any business decisions.

