

# Seeds Of innovation

By Karen Kim

## Q&A with Maryellen Molyneaux, President and Founding Partner of NMI (Natural Marketing Institute)

Maryellen Molyneaux brings over 35 years of health and wellness marketing experience to NMI. Her range of business experience includes retail and corporate management, international consulting, new business start-ups, consumer packaged goods and social marketing and market research management. As President and founding partner of NMI, her specific experience includes strategic consulting, new product development, communication strategy development, qualitative and quantitative trade and consumer research, and market research for mergers and acquisitions. Her health and wellness product research breadth has spanned over 100 product categories including food, dietary supplements, personal care, weight loss and sports nutrition, OTC and pharmaceutical, and alternative healthcare.

Ms. Molyneaux and NMI are well known for their consumer databases now with over ten years of data from over 500,000 consumers with regard to their attitudes and beliefs toward health, wellness and sustainability, their market behavior and product usage trends. Their consumer segmentations are widely used across several industries. Her work is published in a variety of reports and articles and she is also a frequent speaker at industry conferences and professional planning/ideation sessions.



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## What inspired you to begin your business?

The true inspiration came from my own personal need as well as the need in the market. In the 1970s, 20 years before NMI was launched, my own health took a turn so I began researching and looking for alternative healing methods. As I researched alternative options, I found information and new health tools that immediately clicked with me. I met knowledgeable people and started getting results quickly. My health improved and my level of involvement with health and wellness grew as well. The whole health business was still in its infancy but signs of mainstream acceptance were present even in the late 70s.

## What was your initial vision for the company?

In the early 80's, we were involved in retail work, and I knew then that the products and services we supplied would mainstream some day. In fact, that they had to in order to be successful. As we began NMI in 1990, our primary focus was to educate manufacturers on what the market was and would be in health, wellness and sustainability and who the consumers were who were driving the market.

## What void were you hoping to fill in the wellness market?

We recognized the void of good information—valid information on consumers in the health and wellness market—and began the development of NMI's syndicated databases. The three primary focuses are health and wellness, sustainability, and healthy aging (which includes physical, environmental, social, financial, spiritual, and care-giving issues). Our syndicated surveys were created to help marketers understand the consumer needs and the white space in the market.

## What is the philosophy/mission behind your work?

Without question it is our USP (unique selling proposition): strategic solutions for people, planet and profit. NMI's consulting, primary research and syndicated databases are focused on the well being of people and products, the environmental and social responsibility of the planet, and innovative, responsible capitalism. As we stay true to that, it starts with how we run our own business and treat our employees; how we sustain and grow that business; as well as the strategic advice we provide our clients.

## What were some of the early obstacles/sacrifices?

The early sacrifice was time. Starting a new business takes a lot of time. It takes creativity and enormous effort. There is no long reward for easy work. True success comes with hard work and diligence. The main obstacle to developing our syndicated data was getting companies to listen. In the mid 90s marketers were still

skeptical about what we were doing and questioned whether our work was important or whether these ideas would mainstream. Proving that these were viable businesses was a difficult task. How we do business has migrated over the years. The focus is on the broader issues of health, wellness and sustainability and how they impact the market as a whole. We were talking about corporate social responsibility back in 2002, long before it was considered "in vogue". Now we are witnessing the culture of sustainability and how it affects every element of our lives.

## What innovation have you brought to the wellness market?

That's been the fun part. The depth of the data we initiated and have continued to develop over the years—we have over 10 years of data across 500,000 consumers in our databases now, which gives us an enormous amount of information. We package and present all that information in a unique way for marketers, so that they can see the attitudes and behaviors of consumers, and they can see it by segment. Categorizing consumers into our unique consumer segmentation models has become increasingly important and valuable for our clients. This data and insight allows our clients to strategize and plan both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Our data give marketers continuity in their planning and execution. We have taught manufacturers how to hit the sweet spot and do it profitably. It's simply good for the company, the planet and the people.

## What is the benefit for a company to utilize your services?

Clients benefit from the years of experience NMI brings and the depth of data we provide. Marketers can use our syndicated data and custom data mining to identify specific trends and how those trends will impact their business. The ability to analyze by segment allows our clients to develop products, programs, and communications targeted to the most opportunistic consumer segments.

## What does the future hold for your company?

The future looks very bright. Issues surrounding health, wellness and sustainability are forever growing and will remain important to marketers for the foreseeable future. I am eternally grateful to be in this industry and to be able to contribute to its growth. And my deep and personal interest continues to expand as well.

## What advice would you give other hopeful entrepreneurs?

I spend a lot of time talking to college students and youth groups about discovering what it is they want to do and how to build a career around that desire. I always tell them that I firmly believe that when you have a personal passion, it never becomes boring and it never becomes "work". It will at times be hard, but that personal passion will always carry you through and you will always enjoy what you do.

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