

Giving consumers the power

 By [Beverley Klein](#)

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With a focus on all things commerce this month on Bizcommunity, we got some insight into the world of sports nutrition from Donato Colangelo, marketing manager for USN.



Donato Colangelo

How have consumers changed in the last few years?

Colangelo: The sports nutrition market is one of the largest in the world, and its value is estimated at \$10bn (growing at 8.3% per year). Although this growth certainly did not happen overnight, it is a true reflection of consumers' desire globally to be healthier, fitter and stronger. Most consumers are results-driven and as long as the products they use have the desired effect, they are willing to pay. South African consumers alone have grown the sports nutrition market to around R700,000 million, which is indicative of their commitment to leading healthier lives.

With almost half of South African adults considered obese, consumers' buying behaviour shows that they take recognisance of the fact that they need to change their lifestyles in order to change their lives. USN has been the South African market leader in the sports and healthy lifestyle supplements field for 14 years. This speaks volumes of the trust relationship that consumers have built with USN and our products over the years. New sports and nutrition supplements appear and disappear from the shelves on a daily basis, but consumers will always stick to what they know especially when what's on offer works, is of world-class quality and is competitively priced.

How did the Blue Label Testing Lab come about?

Colangelo: As a brand, USN has always taken pride in the extensive research and development of our product ranges, which comprises everything from weight loss to everyday wellness, and from hardcore muscle building to total body makeovers. However, we recognise that as much as market research has its merits, vital insights do not necessarily always translate into action in terms of consumer needs and preferences. Enter the Blue Label Testing Lab, the first Consumer Research and Development programme in the South African sports and healthy lifestyle supplements category that makes the end-user of the product the ultimate decider of its final released formula.

USN used a newly developed extreme pre-workout range called B4-Bomb as a pilot for the Blue Label Testing Lab. We carefully selected 100 customers (professional athletes, fitness and wellness experts, as well as leading industry influencers) to kick off the first round of testing. The first wave of B4-Bomb feedback was then fed into USN's Research and Development department where the product's final formulation was fine-tuned for optimal results based on precise consumer feedback and specific needs. Soon after this, B4-Bomb was launched onto the market. We are proud to announce that the original participants have embarked on another round of testing - this time for variants such as flavours.

What has the feedback been like?

Colangelo: The level of authentic, unscripted participation and feedback which we received from the programme's 100 handpicked consumers on our social media platforms, as well as on the dedicated Blue Label Testing online feedback portal, has been invaluable. It has opened up so many possibilities for the research and development of existing as well as future products. From a consumer point of view, the feedback on B4-Bomb has also been unprecedented, which is reassuring to us, because it shows that we get what our consumers want. Going forward, we want to take the learnings from the Blue Label Testing pilot, improve and build on it for the future of our brand's research and development and beyond.



USN HAS CHOSEN 100 ATHLETES, OPINION LEADERS & INFLUENCERS TO TAKE PART IN THE SUPPLEMENT INDUSTRY'S 1ST INTERACTIVE CONSUMER TESTING PROGRAM,
THE USN BLUE LABEL TESTING LAB

■ ***Explain the instant feedback platform and how it has helped with the programme...***

Colangelo: Let's face it, we live in a world of instant everything where technology reigns supreme. With our instant feedback platform, participants of the Blue Label Testing Lab could simply login to the website and give real time feedback based on a list of predetermined questions and metrics. This way, we did not have to wait weeks for results and consumers did not have to wait weeks to give feedback. It was also important for us to receive the responses organically and as part of consumers' daily workout routines. This resulted in authentic feedback of the highest standard, which translated into a pre-workout product unlike any other available on the market.

■ ***How has social media and instant feedback changed commerce?***

Colangelo: Social media and instant feedback has definitely given consumers a megaphone and multiple opportunities to be heard. More than an "all suggestions welcome box", social media has bridged the proverbial gap between consumer and brand. The results? Brands have gently been forced to walk the talk and to stand accountable for their products and services, but in an informal setting where everyone is on equal footing. Social media and the age of instant feedback has also brought with it faster communication channels, and it has opened up the gateway to greater e-commerce opportunities in previously uncharted territories.

■ ***Explain what consumer led product development means for future brand growth?***

Colangelo: The value of this level of control by the consumer, as displayed in the Blue Label Testing programme, cannot be underestimated among an increasingly health and body-conscious market. We are talking about a market for which what is put into the body, and how it works, in conjunction with their physical regimes, is of the highest priority.

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ABOUT BEVERLEY KLEIN

Beverley Klein is the editor of the Marketing Media South Africa section on Bizcommunity.com. With a background in journalism and historical studies, she's dived into the world of industry news, curating content, writing and interviewing thought leaders. She's often spotted in a forest on the weekend and rarely seen without a camera. Follow [@BevCPT](#).

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