

Michael's Naturopathic Programs: Traveling the Path of Nature for 30 Years

BY LAUREN TOM



Naturopathy, meaning “to follow the path of nature,” is the essence and foundation of Michael's Naturopathic Programs, San Antonio, TX, started 30 years ago. The company's commitment to the natural products industry and to healthy longevity has shined through over the past three decades, and is unwavering to this day. After launching more than 100 products over the years, company founder and president Michael Schwartz insists not much has changed about the company and its mission, besides the fact that, as he says, “I have gotten older.”

Though Schwartz's success is evident today, he faced challenges and obstacles in launching the company and forging a path of nature for the firm to travel.

Beginning of the Path

The company, established in 1984, had plenty to live up to, since Schwartz had been working in the natural food industry for a long time. He had numerous jobs within the industry as a sales rep, a retailer, a naturopathic counselor and a producer of nutritional supplements and other products. With this experience under his belt, Schwartz was ready for his next challenge, inspired by an ad he saw in an industry magazine in the early 1980s. “They

were promoting what I thought was a garbage chemical product that did not belong in the health food industry. I knew I could make something similar that would be cleaner and healthier,” he says.

Determined, Schwartz went on a mission to create top-quality, efficacious formulas. “Through understanding the root cause of a condition and the effect it has on a secondary system, I then researched all the nutrients to support the proper functioning



Michael Schwartz

of the systems in question,” he says. “I provide high-potency amounts to facilitate the body's ability to have what it needs to restore balance, harmony and proper functioning.”

His high standards made launching a brand new company anything but a walk in the park. Heavily invested in the principles of naturopathy, he made the decision to rule out hormone-based or glandular products that he did not feel were “tried and true” formulas centered on the principles of healing.

Schwartz says being an “unknown” was difficult at first. He even kept his night job working in a health food store so his family could have steady income and support. However, he kept his head up because he knew he had great working formulas, con-

firmed by the results of his patients. “Thankfully, people started selling my programs and were getting great feedback from their customers and that allowed my growth to continue,” he says.

Competition at its Finest

But to be a true success, Schwartz knew he had to do something different from competing supplement makers. “When I formulate, I take into consideration more than the obvious issue. I look at the surrounding systems that are also affected and address those needs as well,” he says.

When creating the naturopathic formulas designed to nourish and support the body, inspiration came from his family, friends and clients, as he created specific products for each person. This was the start of something groundbreaking; the first gender-specific and age-specific supplements.

“Back in the 80s, my wife could not stomach the multivitamins that were in the marketplace. So, I created something for her that I felt would be easier to digest and assimilate. Since what I did for her was not strong enough for me, I created a multi for myself. Since I had a girl and a boy, it only made sense to make something for them that would be age appropriate,” says Schwartz. Today, one can shop the company's line by health concerns as well as by categories like children's, tweens, teens, young adults, student health, men's health and women's health.

Another move that has set the company apart from the crowd is Schwartz's strong commitment and loyalty to independent stores. Products are only available on a direct basis, exclusively to health and natural food stores and cannot be found in mass-market stores.



Final Hurdle

After establishing himself in the naturopathy business, his company began to find success in the industry. However, Schwartz was not one to become complacent. Feeling the need to label his products with descriptive names and produce educational literature, he butted heads with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, pushing the limits of structure/function claims allowable through the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994. Schwartz had to stand up for what he believed in and fought for what he thought was right for the company and consumers' health.

The Path

Michael's has come a long way in the past three decades. Something that may always be a beacon of light for the company is Michael's Synergistically Complete Concept to support all the body's systems and maintain a healthy balance. The concept establishes the idea of “finding the cause, treating the whole person, doing no harm and utilizing the healing power of nature.” It has become a guiding principle for many formulators in the industry.

No matter what challenges come his way, Schwartz has a firm grip on where his company is headed. He says to expect “a more concerted effort to let the consumer know what real nutrition is about and how it can help, heal or arrest any condition that they are dealing with.” **WF**