The Experience Standard™

How Consumer Experience Is Redefining Product Quality

A THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PUBLICATION

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About This Publication

The Experience Standard examines how evolving consumer expectations are redefining what “product quality” means in the dietary supplement industry, and the opportunity that shift creates for organizations willing to lead.

This edition follows the consumer past the first impression. A supplement is used again and again, and each use is a complete sensory experience that shapes confidence, memory, and the decision to buy again. The chapters that follow look at quality across that whole relationship.

The publication offers a leadership perspective for people across research, quality, manufacturing, and commercial functions. Its purpose is to open a conversation about consumer experience as an authentic expression of quality, and to prompt new thinking about competitive advantage.

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FOREWORD

A Note From Our CEO

For more than twenty-five years, ScentSational Technologies has helped leading consumer packaged goods companies improve the sensory experience of their products, and for the past decade we have worked alongside many of the world's leading dietary supplement companies. In that time the industry has made supplements safer, more effective, and more consistent than ever.

One observation keeps surfacing in my conversations with brand owners and manufacturers. Consumers judge a product long before they can judge whether it works, and they keep judging it every time they open the bottle and take what is inside.

> *If organizations have mastered creating quality, how do they ensure consumers recognize it every time they use the product?*

This publication explores that question. Whether your work lies in R&D, quality, manufacturing, regulatory affairs, or commercial leadership, I hope it prompts useful conversations about how we continue to strengthen consumer confidence.

Sincerely,

Barry M. Edelstein
President & CEO, ScentSational Technologies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Next Stage of Quality

For decades, the dietary supplement industry has advanced product quality through stronger science, disciplined manufacturing, rigorous quality systems, and continuous innovation. That foundation benefits consumers worldwide and is not in question.

A new opportunity is now emerging. Consumers increasingly judge products by how they experience them as well as by what they do. Before efficacy can be demonstrated, they form opinions through what they see, smell, taste, and feel, and those impressions shape confidence and influence trust.

The first impression is only the beginning. A supplement is opened, handled, and taken dozens or even hundreds of times over the life of a bottle. Each use is a complete sensory experience: the aroma when the cap comes off, the look and smell of the product in hand, the anticipation of how it will taste, and the taste itself. Each experience leaves a memory, and those memories add up to how the consumer feels about the brand when it is time to buy again.

This publication proposes that product quality has entered its next stage of evolution. Organizations have mastered creating quality. The next opportunity is ensuring consumers experience that quality fully and consistently, from the first opening to the last, in ways that build lasting preference.

> *Organizations create quality. Consumers recognize quality through experience.*

This is The Experience Standard.

CHAPTER ONE

Quality Has Evolved

The dietary supplement industry has never stood still. Scientific substantiation has grown more rigorous, manufacturing more disciplined, supplier qualification more comprehensive, and analytical technology more sophisticated. Quality systems have matured into robust frameworks built to protect consumers and ensure consistency. Together, these advances represent one of the industry's greatest achievements.

Every generation of leaders eventually confronts the same question: what comes next? History is clear that excellence is never static. Yesterday's competitive advantage becomes today's baseline expectation. The organizations that lead tomorrow will keep their scientific rigor and manufacturing excellence and build on both.

If quality has evolved inside the organization, something has also changed outside it: the consumer. Consumers have not lowered their expectations; they have expanded them. They now expect products that are effective and safe, and also thoughtfully designed, enjoyable to use, and consistent with the promises brands make.

The next opportunity, then, goes beyond creating quality. It lies in ensuring consumers fully recognize and experience the quality organizations have worked so hard to achieve, at the first use and at every use after it. Understanding those expectations is where The Experience Standard begins.

CHAPTER TWO

Consumer Expectations Have Changed

Quality has never existed in isolation from the people it serves. A defining feature of today's marketplace is that consumers want more complete experiences while asking for no less science and no lower standards. Effectiveness, safety, transparency, and consistency are now the baseline. Increasingly, consumers also expect products that feel intuitive, enjoyable, and confidence-inspiring from the very first interaction.

This shift is not unique to supplements. Consumers encounter exceptional design in nearly every category of their lives: premium food and beverage, personal care, technology, hospitality, and healthcare. Those experiences set expectations that carry directly into the wellness aisle. A consumer does not lower the bar when buying a supplement; they bring with them the standards set by every premium brand they already trust.

Supplements also hold an unusual place among the products people buy. Most are taken daily, often for months or years, so the experience is repeated far more often than with almost any other purchase. That repetition raises the stakes of every sensory detail.

> *Consumers rarely experience technical excellence directly. They experience the product itself, again and again.*

That reality changes how quality is perceived. Technical excellence remains essential, but consumers seldom see it firsthand. Before any health benefit can be evaluated, they have already formed impressions based on what they see, smell, touch, and taste. Those impressions shape confidence, and confidence shapes trust.

None of this means every supplement should smell or taste the same. Different brands, product formats, and consumer segments call for different sensory strategies. What matters is intentionality: the sensory experience should reinforce the product's purpose and the brand's promise. Consumers increasingly reward brands that feel complete. Products that are scientifically excellent and thoughtfully experienced are more likely to become part of daily routines, earn recommendations, and build long-term loyalty.

Rising consumer expectations are an invitation to let science be more fully appreciated. Which raises the next question: how, exactly, do consumers recognize quality?

CHAPTER THREE

How Consumers Recognize Quality

Organizations understand quality through science, formulation, validated processes, and analytical testing. Consumers encounter it very differently. They do not witness ingredient qualification, review certificates of analysis, or observe manufacturing discipline. They experience the finished product, and they begin forming judgments almost instantly.

The speed of that judgment is striking. Research on first impressions has shown that people form durable assessments of trustworthiness and competence within roughly a tenth of a second of exposure, and that additional time tends to reinforce those snap judgments rather than revise them.[1] In a purchasing context, the implication is direct: the first interaction with a product often sets expectations that color every experience that follows.

That first judgment is then tested with each use. A consumer who opens a 90-count bottle once a day revisits their first impression ninety times, and each encounter either confirms it or begins to wear it down.

Packaging creates anticipation, and appearance communicates care. Opening the package delivers the first direct sensory signal. Aroma shapes expectation, taste confirms or challenges it, and texture and ease of use complete the picture. These interactions recur every time the product is used, and together they become the language through which consumers interpret quality.

This is a well-documented feature of how people evaluate products. The field of sensory marketing has demonstrated that the senses systematically shape perception, judgment, and behavior, often below the level of conscious awareness.[2] A closely related and long-established principle, sometimes called sensation transference, describes how impressions formed from a product's sensory and packaging cues transfer onto the product itself, influencing how good consumers believe it to be.[3]

> *Quality is created inside the organization. Confidence is created each time a consumer recognizes that quality.*

None of these sensory attributes determine whether a product is scientifically effective. Yet each contributes to whether consumers believe the product reflects the quality they expect from the brand behind it. When technical information is hard to evaluate, as it usually is for a consumer holding a bottle, people rely on the observable cues available to them. In supplements, sensory experience becomes one of the most powerful of those cues, and it is renewed with every use.

That creates a clear leadership opportunity. Organizations can intentionally design sensory characteristics to reinforce the quality already engineered into the product. The objective is to ensure every consumer interaction consistently reflects the organization's commitment to

excellence, without artificial effects and without distracting from the science. When science and sensory experience communicate the same message, trust becomes far easier to establish.

If consumers recognize quality through experience, removing negative sensory characteristics is no longer enough. The next strategic question is whether organizations should design products consumers merely accept, or products they actively prefer.

CHAPTER FOUR

From Acceptability to Preference

For many years, the sensory objective in dietary supplements was clear: remove barriers to consumption. Formulators worked to reduce bitterness, control objectionable aromas, and improve mouthfeel, turning products consumers might otherwise avoid into products they were willing to use. That work has been genuinely valuable. An unpleasant experience can undermine even the most scientifically effective product, so eliminating negative sensory characteristics became an essential part of development.

Today, consumer expectations invite a broader question. Is the goal to create products consumers accept, or products they genuinely prefer to experience? The distinction looks subtle. It is not.

> *Acceptability minimizes barriers. Preference creates engagement.*

Acceptability focuses on removing dissatisfaction; preference focuses on creating positive engagement. Both matter, and they produce different business outcomes. A product that clears the acceptability bar may perform exactly as intended while generating little emotional connection. A preferred product encourages continued use because the experience keeps reinforcing confidence in the brand, and over time that confidence compounds into habit, repeat purchase, recommendation, and loyalty.

Repetition is what makes the distinction so important in supplements. A product used once can get by on acceptability. A product used every day for months depends on whether the daily experience is one the consumer welcomes or merely tolerates.

Scientific quality remains the foundation of every credible supplement, and sensory appeal does nothing to replace it. Preference is meaningful only when it reflects genuine product excellence. Experience should express quality and should never be asked to stand in for it.

Designing for preference also demands intentionality. A children's chewable, a sports-nutrition beverage, and a premium botanical capsule each communicate quality in different ways. Preference therefore takes many sensory forms, held together by a disciplined commitment to aligning experience with consumer expectations and brand identity.

Organizations that adopt this view begin asking different questions during development. Instead of "is the product acceptable?" they ask, "does every consumer interaction strengthen confidence in the quality we've created?" That single change in perspective influences formulation, sensory evaluation, packaging, and ultimately the relationship between consumer and brand. What began as a differentiator is fast becoming an expectation. Consumers increasingly assume a considered experience, and products that leave it to chance fall short of a rising standard. The advantage now lies in how consistently a brand delivers that experience, across every product and every use.

If preference is the new objective, one pair of sensory attributes deserves particular attention. Among all the ways consumers encounter a product, aroma and taste are the earliest, most immediate, and most memorable expressions of quality.

CHAPTER FIVE

Aroma & Taste: The First Language of Quality

Every product communicates before it performs. Long before consumers experience efficacy, they form expectations through their senses, and aroma and taste are often the earliest and most lasting of those signals. They are the first language through which a product expresses its quality, and in a supplement that language is spoken every day.

Aroma is especially influential, for reasons rooted in human physiology. The great majority of what we perceive as "flavor" is delivered by our sense of smell rather than by taste alone; remove aroma and even familiar foods become difficult to identify.[4] Smell is also closely tied to emotion and memory. Olfactory signals reach the brain's emotional and memory centers through a remarkably direct pathway, which is why a single scent can trigger vivid recollection and feeling faster than words can.[5] A well-designed aroma pleases in the moment and also leaves an impression that lasts.

Smell does this work at several points in a single use. When the package is opened, aroma drawn in through the nose sets the first expectation. When the consumer shakes out a capsule or tablet and holds it, often close to the face, they smell it again and begin to anticipate how it will taste.[6] When it is taken, aroma travels from the back of the mouth to the nose and becomes part of the flavor itself.[4] The same sense that sets the expectation helps fulfill it.

> *The moment a package is opened is the first sensory event a consumer experiences directly. It is also the first of many.*

Expectation matters as much as sensation. What a consumer anticipates tends to shape what they then perceive, so a pleasant aroma before consumption can make the taste that follows seem better than it otherwise would.[4] When the aroma at opening, the aroma in hand, and the flavor in the mouth tell a consistent story, each one strengthens the others.

For years, aroma and taste were treated mainly as technical problems: suppress the unpleasant, mask the undesirable, improve compliance. Those objectives still matter, particularly for ingredients with naturally difficult profiles. Limiting aroma and taste to problem-solving, however, overlooks their strategic value. When thoughtfully designed, they reassure consumers that the care invested in the formulation has been applied to the whole experience, and they reinforce confidence before a label is read or efficacy is judged.

Intentional does not always mean intense. Different products call for different sensory strategies, and the goal is alignment with the brand's promise. Intentionality also applies to absence. When a product reaches the consumer with no designed aroma, that is rarely a considered decision; more often it is whatever the formulation happened to produce. To a consumer, the absence of a sensory signal is still a signal, and it is one the brand did not choose.

Consumers cannot directly observe formulation science or manufacturing discipline. They rely on signals to decide whether a product deserves their confidence, and aroma and taste are among the most immediate of those signals because people experience them personally. Approached this way, sensory design moves from hiding the unpleasant toward strengthening the perception of quality at each step of use, and aroma and taste become bridges between scientific excellence and consumer experience.

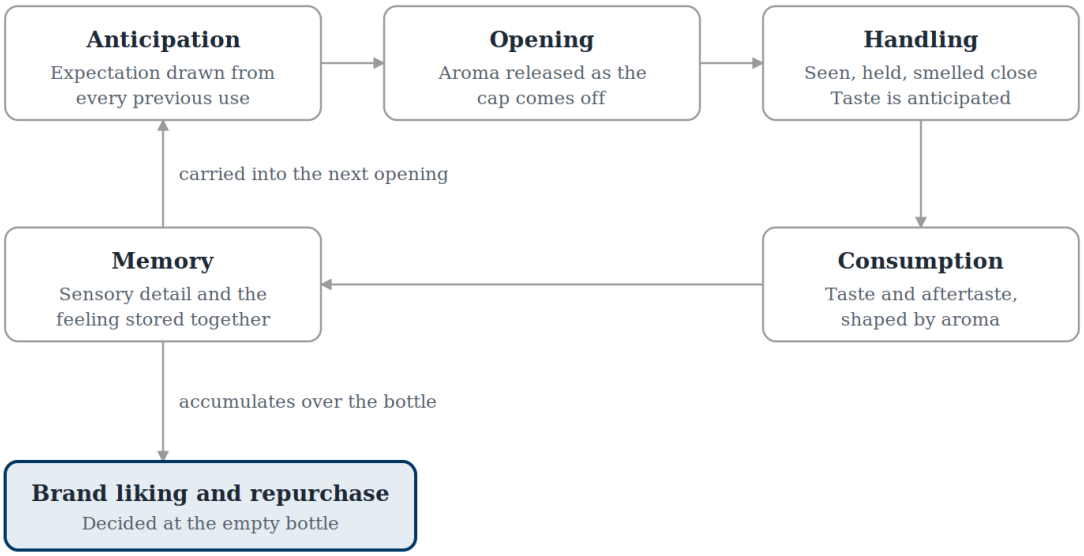
CHAPTER SIX

Every Opening Counts

A supplement is rarely a single experience. A 30-count bottle taken once a day is opened thirty times in a month, and a 90-count bottle ninety times over three months. Larger counts and routines with several servings a day stretch that further. Each of those openings is a complete sensory encounter, and each adds to what the consumer believes about the product and the brand behind it.

The encounter has a shape, and it repeats with every use. It begins with anticipation drawn from previous uses. The cap comes off and the bottle releases its aroma. The consumer shakes out a capsule or tablet, sees it, holds it, and often smells it again at close range, already imagining how it will taste. Then it is taken, and taste, texture, and aftertaste arrive, shaped by the aroma that came before. What remains is a memory, carrying both the sensory detail and the feeling that came with it, and that memory becomes the anticipation the consumer brings to the next opening.

Every use renews the cycle that decides repurchase



> *The first opening sets the expectation. Each one after it tests whether the product keeps its promise.*

Repetition changes the stakes. A first impression can be forgiven if what follows improves on it. A pattern is harder to overlook. When the daily experience is pleasant, the routine becomes easier to keep, and the product earns a small, welcome place in the consumer's day. When it is unpleasant, whether a fishy note or a bitter finish, the consumer meets the same small disappointment every morning, and the habit becomes something to push through. Research on

oral nutritional supplements points the same way. Unpleasant odors and off-flavors are associated with poorer adherence,[6] and physicians most often name smell as the sensory characteristic that influences whether patients keep taking them.[7]

Because smell is so closely tied to emotion and memory,[5] these daily encounters do more than register as pleasant or unpleasant. They accumulate into a feeling about the brand. A consumer who enjoys each opening of a 90-count bottle has, in effect, rehearsed a positive association with the name on the label every day for three months. That accumulated feeling is what brand liking is made of, and it is formed at home, one use at a time.

This is why the end of the bottle matters as much as the beginning. The decision to repurchase is rarely made at the shelf. It is made at home, when the bottle runs low, and it draws on the memory of every opening that came before. A product that pleased on the first day and disappointed by the fortieth has taught the consumer the wrong lesson at exactly the wrong time.

Consistency across the life of the bottle is therefore a quality attribute in its own right. The aroma a consumer meets on day one can differ from the one they meet on day sixty. Headspace grows as the bottle empties, some ingredients develop stronger off-notes with time and air exposure, and pleasant aromas can fade. Quality systems already ask whether the product meets specification from the first serving to the last. The Experience Standard asks the same of the experience: whether the ninetieth opening reflects the same care as the first.

Seen this way, the moment of opening becomes a recurring ritual, and every repetition is an opportunity. Brands that design for the full series of openings give consumers a reason to keep the routine and to reach for the same brand when the bottle is empty.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Experience Standard

One principle has run through every chapter: organizations create quality, and consumers recognize quality through experience. Scientific excellence, manufacturing discipline, and quality systems establish the foundation of every successful supplement. Consumer experience determines how completely that quality is understood, appreciated, and trusted, at the first use and at every use after.

The Experience Standard expands existing quality systems and leaves their foundations in place. It treats quality as a complete journey. Every interaction, from the first moment a consumer notices the package to the last capsule in the bottle, either reinforces or weakens confidence in the brand. Because supplements are used repeatedly, that journey is a cycle, and the standard has to hold on every turn of it.

Operating to this standard requires collaboration across functions. R&D, quality assurance, regulatory affairs, procurement, manufacturing, packaging, sensory science, marketing, and commercial leadership all shape the consumer's perception of quality. No single department owns the experience; it is created collectively, through intentional design and disciplined execution.

The framework also changes the questions asked during development. Beyond "is the formulation scientifically sound and operationally feasible?" leaders begin asking whether the complete experience reflects the same standard of excellence. Do the sensory characteristics support the product's purpose? Does the packaging reinforce confidence? Does the experience hold up across the life of the bottle as well as on the day it is first opened? The aim is consistency rather than added complexity. Consumers should experience the same level of quality the organization strives to achieve internally.

> *Organizations that embrace this standard will compete on the complete expression of quality, across every use of every product.*

This philosophy aligns business objectives with consumer needs. Products that are enjoyed are used consistently, and products used consistently generate satisfaction, recommendation, and repeat purchase. Improving the experience of quality therefore serves both consumer outcomes and organizational performance. The future of product quality lies in the intentional integration of science and experience.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Leadership Opportunity

Every generation of leaders inherits a different definition of competitive advantage. In dietary supplements, previous generations advanced ingredient science, manufacturing excellence, regulatory compliance, and quality management. Those achievements transformed the industry and set the high standards consumers rightly expect today. The next opportunity extends them.

This calls for a broader view of innovation. Alongside discovering new ingredients and improving manufacturing efficiency, innovation now includes intentionally designing experiences that reinforce trust, confidence, and long-term brand preference. Science remains the foundation. Experience becomes its most visible expression.

For Brand Owners

For brands, a designed sensory experience is moving from advantage to expectation. As more of the category delivers a considered experience, its absence grows conspicuous, a gap consumers notice even when they cannot name it. Brands also invest heavily to win a first purchase, through advertising, retail placement, promotions, and sampling. Whether that investment pays off is decided later, at home, as the consumer works through the bottle. When the daily experience disappoints, the brand has paid to acquire a customer it may not keep. Brands that design each opening with care, from the aroma at the cap to the taste of the product, turn quality that lives in a certificate of analysis into quality a consumer can feel every day, and increasingly expects to.

For Contract Manufacturers

For contract manufacturers, the opportunity is equally direct. As brand clients compete on experience, the manufacturers who help them deliver it become strategic partners. Sensory consistency across a product's in-use life is a natural extension of the quality work manufacturers already own. Offering sensory experience design as a value-added capability differentiates a manufacturer's services, deepens client relationships, and gives brands a reason to consolidate business with a partner who helps them win with consumers at home as well as at scale. In a category where manufacturing capability is increasingly commoditized, the ability to elevate a client's consumer experience is a meaningful advantage.

Whatever the vantage point, the questions leaders ask will evolve:

- Does our product experience reflect the quality we have created?
- Is the experience on day sixty as good as it was on day one?
- Does every sensory interaction, from opening to aftertaste, reinforce our brand promise?
- Are we designing products consumers prefer to experience, or products they merely accept?

- Will the memory of this bottle bring the consumer back for the next one?
- Are we prepared for the next generation of consumer expectations?

These questions move organizations beyond compliance toward intentional differentiation. The Experience Standard is ultimately a leadership philosophy. Exceptional organizations manufacture excellent products and also ensure that every interaction with those products communicates that excellence. When science, quality, and consumer experience align, organizations earn the kind of trust that brings consumers back to the same brand, bottle after bottle.

CONCLUSION

The Opportunity Ahead

The dietary supplement industry has mastered creating quality. Decades of scientific advancement, manufacturing excellence, disciplined quality systems, and continuous innovation have raised products to standards that define responsible organizations and remain the foundation of consumer confidence.

As consumer expectations continue to evolve, another opportunity is emerging. Consumers increasingly recognize quality through the complete experience a product provides, alongside its scientific performance. That experience is renewed with every use, and every opening adds to a memory that shapes confidence, trust, and the decision to return.

The opportunity is to ensure the quality organizations create is fully recognized by the consumers they serve, the first time and every time after.

> *Organizations create quality. Consumers recognize quality through experience.*

This is The Experience Standard.

About ScentSational Technologies

ScentSational Technologies is a sensory innovation company with more than 25 years of expertise in the science of aroma and taste. Over the past decade, we have applied that expertise to the dietary supplement industry, partnering with contract manufacturers, formulators, and brand owners to create products consumers prefer to experience, and solving complex aroma and taste challenges through proprietary technologies, sensory science, and formulation expertise.

Our Aroma-Taste Technology Platform

ScentSational's Aroma-Taste Technology Platform combines proprietary technologies, sensory science, formulation expertise, and application support to help manufacturers optimize the sensory experience of their products.

At the heart of the platform is **ScentCerts®**, our proprietary Aroma-Taste Technology. Placed inside dietary supplement packaging, ScentCerts delivers a controlled, premium aroma each time the product is opened, across the life of the bottle. That aroma greets the consumer at the cap, accompanies the product they take in hand, and shapes their anticipation of taste. It enhances taste perception, elevates enjoyment, and helps each use leave a positive memory that supports brand liking and repeat purchase.

Together, our technologies and expertise help organizations move beyond addressing sensory challenges toward intentionally designing product experiences that strengthen consumer confidence and reinforce brand trust.

Bring The Experience Standard to Your Products

We invite you to a conversation about how sensory experience can strengthen your products and your brand. Request samples or schedule a sensory experience assessment with our team at **www.ScentCerts.com**.

ScentSational Technologies
Delivering Sensory Experiences for 25+ Years

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