

DIRECT SELLING NEWS

TOUCHSTONE ESSENTIALS: (ACCIDENTAL) REBELS WITH A CAUSE

BY J.M. EMMERT



Eddie Stone founded Touchstone Essentials for a simple reason—to help people live healthier, better lives through nutritional supplements.

EDDIE STONE DID NOT CONSIDER HIMSELF A REBEL when he started Raleigh, North Carolina-based Touchstone Essentials. He was simply looking to develop nutritional supplements that would help people live healthier lives. He quickly discovered, however, that demanding organic, clean and natural ingredients for products was a bit of a revolutionary act.

A little revolution is sometimes a good thing though. It can lead to new and innovative ways of doing business and, just as importantly, new ways of providing the public with vital information related to their health and well-being. That spirit of doing things differently from standard norms in product development has permeated into other areas of the Touchstone organization as well, from instituting a new marketing strategy that multiplies consumer touchpoints to fully committing to cloud-based technology to run its global operation.

AN ACCIDENTAL INTRODUCTION

Stone's introduction to the direct selling channel was one of those happy accidents you often hear about in the business world. His wife's car had a flat tire outside a business where a Nu Skin representative happened to work. One hand wash later and Stone and his wife were involved with the direct selling giant, sharing with friends and family the hand wash given them by the rep.

In 1991, Stone then joined Rexall Showcase International (now Unicity International), where he spent 13 years as a distributor building a large team. He credits that experience for the leadership skills required to head a global operation. When it came time to start his own company, he knew the direct selling channel offered the best opportunities to develop products and connect with people.

"When you look at it, direct sales companies have always led the market," Stone says. "Whether it was making herbs mainstream, bringing juices to the masses or pioneering essential oils, direct sales has consistently led the way. It's always been a market ripe for innovation."

What excites him the most about the channel is the way it empowers people to live to their potential, especially during times when the economy is shaky and unpredictable. "Direct selling speaks to the strength of what you can accomplish in one-on-one conversations," he says. "I just don't know of another marketing platform that allows you to communicate

TOUCHSTONE ESSENTIALS

so effectively, to talk about your innovation and what separates you from everyday products or offerings.”

DEFINING BUSINESS ESSENTIALS

Stone will admit that Touchstone Essentials has not been an overnight success story. However, that is not necessarily a bad thing. For Touchstone, founded in 2012, the first few years have witnessed steady growth.

Stone and his executive team used this time to focus heavily on two areas: products and messaging. “From our initial launch with natural detox and targeted whole food supplements in capsules, we’ve now expanded to organic ready-to-mix powders to offer concentrated nutrition with ease and convenience,” says Stone. “These premium organic powders have been met with enthusiasm from Members and Customers, and are on track to add to significant growth for 2017.” The company also has used this startup period to strengthen the supply chain for organic ingredients so when it does experience a major growth spurt, it will be fully prepared.

Developing strong marketing strategies also has been key to building long-term relationships with Members and Customers. Touchstone’s marketing and creative teams—led by Sonia O’Farrell and Jennifer Hulett—have continued to grow the brand messaging through social media, email campaigns, blog content and other tools that share the company’s passion for making healthy products more accessible and affordable for consumers.

Additionally, because its products align so closely with the organic and natural health movement, Touchstone has been fortunate to have been embraced by many experts in the field. “We have an amazing community of doctors and health experts who advocate for our approach, and contribute to our blog,” says Stone. “They share our passion for taking out the bad and putting in the good.”

Focusing efforts on the long-term sustainability of the organization seems to be paying off. In the past 18 months, Touchstone has experienced a double-digit growth rate that Stone is confident is going to cause the company to more than double in 2017. “We’ve actually seen that growth rate increase quite dramatically over the last half of last year and continue into the early part of this year,” he says. “Everything we do is about looking long-term. We are on trend and on the right track.”

RAISING CONSUMER AWARENESS

It is estimated that more than 70 million Americans suffer from some form of digestive distress. All too many turn to products they believe are beneficial for them because of labeling. However, those products may be adding to their problems. Touchstone is committed to developing organic



EDDIE STONE

TOUCHSTONE ESSENTIALS

FOUNDED: 2012

HEADQUARTERS: RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

TOP EXECUTIVE: FOUNDER AND CEO

EDDIE STONE

PRODUCTS: HEALTH AND WELLNESS

products for many reasons, first and foremost being that doing so reflects its values and belief that organic is better for people and the planet, and it supports farmers who grow food using sustainable practices. Another key driver, however, is educating consumers about nutritional supplements.

“Just like there are health foods and junk foods, there are also health supplements and junk supplements,” says Stone. “Too much of what is on store shelves currently falls in the junk category. When we introduced the company, we thought it a revolutionary approach because we found products that said ‘natural’ on the label, but was only an isolated part of a compound, called an isolate. We found that we needed to talk to people to communicate the value of organic to help them meet the full measure of their potential.”

Organic foods tend to have higher antioxidant and nutrient values, and organic ingredients are also notable for what’s not inside: no synthetic pesticides or herbicides, and no toxic additives. Another factor for why Touchstone chose organic is how the ingredients are processed using water extraction instead of harsh solvents.

“Our organic whole food supplements are cutting-edge for what is not in them,” says COO David Isserman. “When you look around the supplement industry, it’s very hard to find truly clean products. We’re committed to nothing artificial and no toxic additives. That doesn’t just mean no artificial colors, flavors, sweeteners or preservatives; it also means no artificial vitamins. We believe you shouldn’t have to be a label expert to know what’s inside.”

Touchstone offers premium, organic products sourced from whole foods. The company’s goal is to make organic goodness easy and accessible to everyone. “We believe it’s not



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**EDDIE STONE, FOUNDER AND CEO,
TOUCHSTONE ESSENTIALS**

too much to ask for your nutritional supplements to meet the same high standard you want for your food: organic, clean and natural,” says Stone. “With double-digit annual growth, organic is in high demand with consumers, but it was (and is) underrepresented in the supplement sector. The direct sales channel is the perfect place to connect with a community that wants, and deserves, better.”

PROBLEM-SOLVING PRODUCTS

Touchstone’s growth has been driven largely by two standout products. One is its natural detox, Pure Body Extra Strength, and the other is its organic green juice powder, Super Green Juice, which provides 44 organic superfoods in one scoop.

“When we develop products what we do is look to solve a problem for people,” says Isserman. “For instance, our detox formula is designed to address the prevalence of toxins we all face in the world today. When many people think of detoxing, they think of difficult cleanses, fasting or multi-step programs. We knew there had to be a better way.”

Touchstone started with a natural detoxifier, mineral zeolite. This meant creating a proprietary process to bring the potential of a natural mineral to fruition. “This includes a cleansing process for the natural zeolite, validated by independent lab testing, to make it a highly effective detox, and using soundwave technology to make a hydrated zeolite spray that is readily absorbed,” Isserman explains.

Touchstone also introduced a product called Wellspring, which has pure essential oils featuring plant-based omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants that help alleviate joint discomfort and support healthy cholesterol levels. Just last month, Organic Super Protein, a vegan protein mix that complements the Super Green Juice, was released. The protein mix and green juice can be used together as a meal replacement or healthy snack.

All of Touchstone’s products are made in the United States, and with a few exceptions, the ingredients used are also U.S.-grown and sourced. Fruits and vegetables are harvested at the peak of ripeness, and then quickly and gently dried into powders to maintain their nutrients. For shipping, the company uses a turnkey system based in Utah, and maintains a distribution center in Europe for fast delivery within the EU. The company currently ships to 55 different countries around the world.

A STRATEGY OF RETARGETING

To succeed on a global scale, companies need a viable marketing strategy that can engage consumers and build trust. However, building brand trust requires multiple touchpoints. Touchstone has employed a strategy to connect Members with consumers using mobile and web-based technology. Its marketing program enables Members, free of charge, to utilize a



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planet at the forefront of the company's plans. "At our core, we're green through and through," he says. "We started with a commitment to clean ingredients, organic practices and sustainability. We follow this approach in ways big and small, and it guides what we do."

Touchstone's goal is to get wholesome products into the hands of consumers, and to reward Members who do that. The company offers a referral bonus based on the initial orders (up to 90 days) of both new Members and new customers. The plan rewards both short-term and long-term. Currently, the company has a strong customer base, with about five times as many customers as Members.

To support the environment, Touchstone's whole food capsules and detox products are packaged in amber glass bottles that are earth friendly and protect the ingredients inside from oxidation. All products are wrapped in recyclable paper, instead of packaging peanuts, in respect for the planet. That focus on being green extends to the company's work environment as well. "We transitioned from a brick-and-mortar headquarters to becoming a completely cloud-based company," says Stone. "We estimated that each person on the team saves an average of 10 working days per year, just by not driving to work. It allows us to reduce our carbon footprint."

While utilizing cloud-based technology was embraced for its positive effect on the environment, it was also founded in Stone's philosophy of enabling staff to be able to experience the same lifestyle that the company sells to Members. "Technology has allowed us to attract incredibly talented, focused and dedicated people because we can put them in a position where they can work globally with technology that allows work to orbit around life instead of life having to orbit around work," says Stone. "Moreover, it allows us to connect on a personal level with how our Members work, from anywhere at any time. I don't think we'll ever go back, and with the technology available today, we don't have to." **DSN**

retargeting system to reinforce the corporate brand and share educational content to support the value of products.

"One of the things that differentiates us is that we have a fairly sophisticated marketing strategy that encompasses retargeting," says Isserman. "When someone visits one of our Member's sites they are tagged for lead protection. Our system understands where that person came from and where they are going."

When that prospect then visits social media platforms, they see targeted ads in their newsfeeds that help to create awareness of Touchstone products as well as share product benefits or offers. When a prospect clicks on an ad, they are taken back to that Member's site where they can learn more or make a purchase.

"Instead of a Member having to chase down a contact, they get automatic follow-up that goes where their contacts are, with targeted content to help build trust," says Isserman. "It allows us, as a company, to have multiple touchpoints and our Members to access a better marketing program for sharing our message."

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Stone believes that the success of his company is due to a holistic approach that puts consumers, Members, and the