

# HFMA Bulletin

Janet Groves, chairman,  
GR Lane Health Products



## Supporting the future of health stores

Following the challenges of 2020, we all hope that 2021 will see a return to a more normal way of life. While many non-essential businesses were required to close last March, the Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) worked hard to ensure that health food businesses were recognized as offering an essential service. As a result, health food stores were able to remain open throughout lockdown, providing vital health supplements and foods to support the health and wellbeing of the nation.

Although essential shops remained open, many people were anxious about leaving home and there was a significant shift to online shopping. Many people have discovered how easy it is to order groceries online or to use click-and-collect services and I believe this trend will continue in a post-pandemic world. It isn't just frequency of online purchasing that has increased, research suggests that consumer confidence in e-shopping has also increased. So, if you don't already have a website, now might be the time to consider setting one up. Even if you do not have a full e-commerce platform, a website or even social media channels can act as great signposts to your in-store retail offering. However, for the long-term future of health food businesses, it remains important that we restore shopper confidence and entice consumers back to the high street.

The important thing to recognize is that bricks and mortar stores offer an experience that e-commerce sites simply cannot compete with, offering not just a means to purchase but the whole shopping experience. Welcoming, knowledgeable staff is something that has always been a trademark of the specialist health food industry. By offering consumers a personalized service

and expert advice in store, you can give them a reason to visit your shop and have an opportunity to build loyalty. Remember, the Health Food Institute (HFI) continues to offer a range of valuable training courses for you and your staff.

It is now more important than ever to provide expertise and advice to consumers as there is a renewed focus on keeping healthy. Since last spring, there has been a significant behaviour shift as a result of COVID-19 with a greater focus on overall health and wellbeing which has driven an increase in self-care. To build on this growing awareness, the HFMA, in collaboration with the National Association of Health Stores (NAHS) and HFI, has invested in a new website ([www.healthydoesit.org](http://www.healthydoesit.org)) to help support health stores across the UK.

The website encourages consumers to maintain healthy habits adopted during lockdown, building on their growing awareness of natural products and the range of high quality natural alternatives available. The searchable map ensures consumers can quickly and easily locate their local health store and there is the opportunity to include information about your shop, together with a link to your website. If you want to learn more, or to make sure your own store is involved, please contact [esther@hfma.co.uk](mailto:esther@hfma.co.uk).

This is a major initiative from the HFMA, and the benefits are completely free to all health stores, so make sure you get in touch and ensure your store is included. With regular updates supported by ongoing promotional campaigns, it is a great tool to increase footfall and attract new consumers to your store, helping to secure the future of this special industry that we all care so much about.

*The views expressed by our columnists do not necessarily reflect the views of our editor or publishers*