

Will Health Supplements Profit From Flu Scare? Lessons From SARS

Contributed by Synovate
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In June 2003, the World Health Organisation (WHO) pronounced that the worst was over in the global fight against Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Synovate's report, "SARS Unmasked", provided a snapshot look at six markets in Asia and the changed consumer behaviours and attitudes that resulted from the health crisis.

The insights from the 2003 report are striking in view of the unfolding swine flu scare:

- The rate of concern over infection is not directly correlated to actual infection or fatality rates. Strength of concern appears to be a function of perceived risk combined with messages received from government or media sources.
- The public deals with health threats in two ways: managing one's own health through boosting the immune system and cutting oneself off from potential carriers of the disease "isolationism". The last is driven by fear of the unknown.
- Understanding the public's strategies for survival helps clarify how economies will be affected. Whilst most reporting has focused on the negative impact on the economy, there are in fact opportunities too. Home entertainment and Internet usage increased during SARS, as sales of detergents, cleansers and health supplements rose.
- While opportunities exist, isolationism is still the greatest menace to an overall economy. The reduction in transport, dining and socialising has a far greater negative impact than the opportunities presented by the crisis. It is the ability of a market to overcome the inclination towards isolationism that will determine how quickly it can recover.

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