

A hub of fruitful endeavours

The South African Fruit Juice Association (SAFJA) has made substantial inroads in its ambitions to create a window to the association via a website, which was launched in July.

This is according to SAFJA chairman, Peter Cowie, who says: “We worked very closely with the Australian Fruit Juice Association, customising formats and ‘Did you know’-type facts and other information from its website for the South African market. Our technical committee then ensured that everything was legal and correct in terms of South African standards and conditions.”

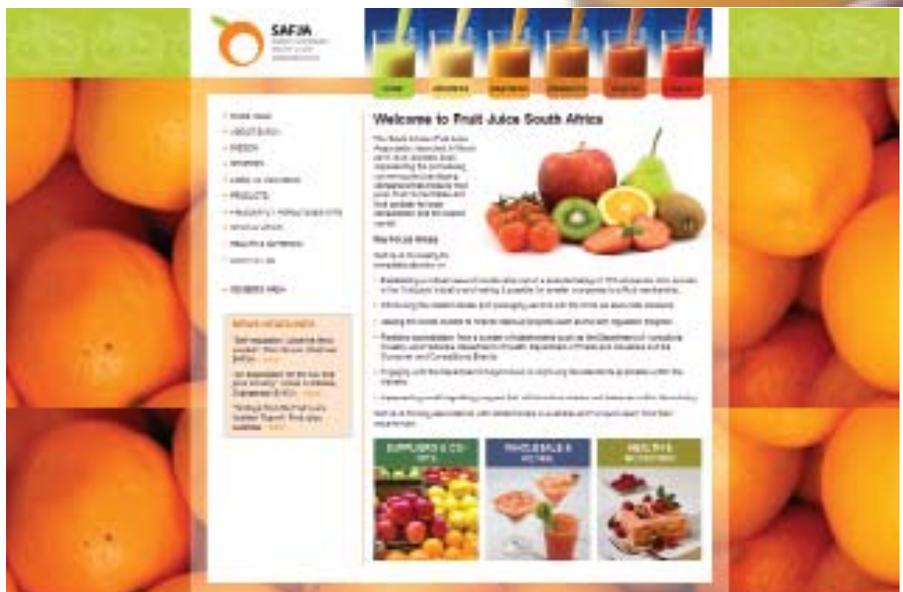
Cowie remarks that the website has been incredibly successful so far. “It has had a powerful impact and has elicited responses from a range of interested parties, including overseas customers of the members shown on the website, as well as people now wanting to join as members of the association.”

He says that SAFJA’s next challenge will be to sustain what they have built up, and that this will require ongoing efforts to ensure that the site remains up to date and relevant.

Cowie adds that the other important focus of 2012 was to set up a permanent home for SAFJA in Paarl. “SAFJA was put in contact with SA Canners and took up space in a building which is a hub of fruit-related institutions. We also hired a general manager, Rudi Richards, who set up the office in the hub, so that meetings and discussions can now take place there,” he states. “Rudi joins us with a great deal of experience in respect of the food industry as well as regulatory affairs, and will soon start addressing a wider range of SAFJA issues.”

SAFJA has also acquired the services of Hortgro, a company that is extensively involved in agri services. Cowie explains that Hortgro will provide a range of administrative services and will also enable SAFJA to become more involved in the broader issues facing the fruit industry.

He says SAFJA accepted an invitation by



Market survey

Peter Cowie, chairman of the South African Fruit Juice Association (SAFJA), says: "The first market survey was launched by the joint SGF and Afri Compliance team recently. SAFJA provided a broad scope - with 100% unsweetened fruit juice blends being of main interest - and listed the range of products within that scope, as well as nectars (limited to two fruit varieties)."

"SGF defined the sample list and extracted samples in the presence of a DAFF representative, and these were sent to SGF in accordance with the control procedure," Cowie states. "In order to ensure that any interpretation by SGF's laboratory in Germany was done according to South African legislation; the technical team with the help of DAFF provided SGF with a consolidated version of our legislation, as well as a tabled summary of all the characteristics/properties of the products."

The plan is for SGF to complete the analysis by end-September with final reports due around end-October. The statistical results will be presented to the SAFJA board who will then present the findings to members.

He stresses that one of the main challenges in terms of implementing a self-regulating process is the fact that sampling analysis has to be done overseas at high cost. SAFJA therefore approached Stellenbosch University's Central Analytical Facilities (CAF) to establish capabilities in terms of equipment and experience in the field of authenticity. "The unit has nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy capabilities, and has done considerable research on wine and juice. It is, unfortunately, not able to do isotope ratio determination. We were, however, referred to a laboratory at the University of Cape Town that can do this kind of analysis."

Cowie adds that extra samples were drawn during the market survey and were dispatched to CAF and UCT for authenticity screening, in order to establish a benchmark of their capabilities.

Another issue being addressed by SAFJA is the draft regulations relating to the use of Sweeteners in Foodstuffs (R880), which were gazetted on 21 October 2011 by the Department of Health (DoH).

Cowie explains that this regulation defines deionised, deflavourd juice or juice concentrates as a sugar, and conflicts with the fruit juice regulation (R286), where deflavourd juice concentrates are used interchangeably in pure (100%) fruit juice blends.

"SAFJA presented its opinions to DoH, which has consequently decided that these ingredients will be removed from the definition of sugar, mainly because these food items are not additives, and thus cannot be included in this regulation." **F&B**

the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry (DAFF), and met in June to discuss the proposed amendments to the existing 30-year-old regulations known as R286. Thereafter, the technical committee engaged with members, non-members and other interested parties to formulate a response to DAFF. Although the majority of SAFJA's members agreed to the changes, some members strongly opposed them, especially the removal of the sweetened category.

SAFJA prepared a report setting out its technical arguments in favour of the proposed change, and appointed Trade Law Chambers to formally submit the report to DAFF before the extended expiry date of 31 July.

After having reviewed a number of submissions, DAFF issued a report on 11 September setting out its decisions, the major change being the removal of the sweetened fruit juice class. The DAFF process to obtain ministerial approval (Gazette publication) is expected to take three to four months, with a 12-month implementation period thereafter.

Cowie adds: "With regards to introducing a new set of regulations to be more compatible with international standards and current legislation, such as the labelling requirements and the Consumer Protection Act, DAFF is working on a framework and will ask the SAFJA technical committee to assist with adding relevant wording to the framework."

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