

Strategic marketing or unethical promotion? A history of Annum

Annum entered the infant and young child feeding sector through its milk for pregnant women and mothers. Fonterra's predecessor, the New Zealand Dairy Board launched **Annum 1** for pregnant women and **Annum 2** for lactating mums in the 1990s.

When these products (now rebranded as **Annum Materna** and **Annum Lacta** respectively) hit the market and were promoted in a big way, the need for such products, which are much more expensive than nutrient-rich local foods, was questioned by nutritionists and health workers.

Women are perfectly capable of selecting a well balanced healthy diet during pregnancy and lactation at a fraction of the cost of glamorous milks like **Annum**. However, the promotion of such expensive designer products may lead women to believe erroneously that they are necessary for a safe pregnancy and successful breastfeeding. Furthermore, **Annum** had portrayed itself as supporter of the breastfeeding movement and was at the forefront of 'helping' health facilities to celebrate breastfeeding events.

Broken trust

When some questioned whether **Annum** promotion should be allowed in healthcare facilities, it was argued that these products did not come under the scope of the Code. Unlike other brands of milks for mothers which are linked to formula products through similar names and logo, the **Annum** brand was not tied to a formula product at this stage. In this respect, **Annum** had the upper hand. While other competitors were blocked from entering health facilities, **Annum** was allowed to do so.

It was seen as the "squeaky clean" player from New Zealand which did not promote milk for babies.

Then and now – Annum products and promotional materials have become more sophisticated over time. The cost of these 'designer products' for mothers is passed on to consumers, while health experts maintain that their ostensible need or value has not been proven with reliable and scientific evidence.



Above: Folate and calcium additives evolved to become *nutri-Q-plus* advertised with gobbledegook like 'hi-folate, SA, GA and EFA, a precursor to DHA and AA'. The highly touted folic acid is naturally found in nuts and leafy vegetables. It works best in the first month of pregnancy, a time when most women do not even know they are pregnant and would not dream of taking Annum.

Annum in its latest packaging as seen in Malaysia, March 2011.

Enticing gadgets – who could resist?

From mothers to babies

Annum became accepted in health care facilities in South East Asia to the degree that in some communities pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers are told by health workers to take Annum milks because:

"a well balanced diet does not always guarantee an adequate intake of all nutrients"

"your baby's healthy brain development is in your hands"

[the product is] *"good brain food for the child in your tummy"* or *"the first gift from mum to baby"*.

Annum developed goodwill among health workers and health facilities and it was not long before **Annum Infacare** infant formulas and follow on formulas were launched into the market. By the early 2000s, **Annum Infacare** formula for babies had become prominent in the market place, following the 'good' reputation already gained.

Look What they're Doing Now

So how does Fonterra market **Annum** formula products? Due to its foothold in health facilities through its promotion of milks for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, the **Annum** brand enjoys prestige and favour with many health facilities.

For example, private hospitals in Malaysia allow **Annum** access to provide routine supplies of formula milks in standard retail size packs and ready-to-feed liquid formulas for distribution to mothers in maternity wards.

Gifts bearing the **Annum** logo and sporting the **Annum** colours such as rucksacks, tote bags, samples of milks for mothers, free regular size formula packs and ready-to-feed bottles are commonly distributed to mothers by hospital staff, thus conferring much valued medical endorsement of the brand.

Annum also seeks direct contact with mothers through its online club and through member-get-member schemes.

All the practices described above are forbidden under the Malaysian Code.

Annum by Fonterra – well, it's squeaky clean no more.



(Thailand, circa 2002)

In Thailand, Annum is promoted as "the first gift from mom to baby" and the fetus with an Annum tin image in this ad illustrates how Annum mothers are "Giving love and good things to baby from the start of life"

Surely this would never be allowed in New Zealand?

Formula for mothers is not sold in New Zealand but in Thailand, gullible women who are not even culturally predisposed to drinking milk lap it up influenced by this sort of marketing.



▲ (UAE, circa 2003)



▲ Malaysia, 2005

Companies are not allowed to contact mothers yet they were given samples and felicitations from Annum. (Malaysia 2005)



◀ Surreptitious supplies – full size formula products periodically given to a private hospital in Malaysia (2010)

Annum samples and gifts in their latest corporate colours. (2011) ▼



All these gifts for one baby – at another private hospital in Malaysia, family members of a breastfed baby, received a full array of Annum gifts and products from staff during a follow-up visit, testimony to the quantity of forbidden freebies Annum provides to hospitals.