GS1 GDSN success story

Belgian non-profit uses GS1 GDSN to give consumers information about the food they buy

Belgian consumers want to know more information about food items beyond what fits on the label. Aktina's BATRA app uses product data provided by brand owners to meet those expectations.

The people at non-profit organisation Aktina know the vitally important role reliable and correct product data plays in educational and awareness-raising activities. In fact, the organisation, which has been providing information and training to Belgian citizens since 2006, has a free web and smartphone app designed to help consumers understand the information on food labels.

The app—called BATRA (BArcode TRAnslator)—allows Belgians to decipher a food product label in the blink of an eye, simply by scanning the barcode on the product.

The information provided by BATRA is drawn from product data made available by brand owners themselves because it draws upon the product data in My Product Manager, the GS1 Global Data Synchronisation Network (GS1 GDSN®)-Certified Data Pool of GS1 Belgilux. It's part of Aktina's work to promote healthy behaviours and sustainable mindsets.

Data straight from the source

Claude Heyman is technical manager at Aktina. Prior to joining the organisation, he managed the production of electronic ID cards at the National Population Register of Belgium.

This experience led him to realise that just like all Belgians have a unique number on their ID cards, all food products also have a unique number that identifies them, thanks to their Global Trade Item Number (GTIN). This is why the product data that is displayed by BATRA comes "from the brand owners via GS1 GDSN."

Eat with a clear conscience

BATRA's development was triggered by European Union regulation N° 1169/2011, more familiarly known as the INCO (INformation for COnsumers) directive.

In summary, INCO made it mandatory to have clear, comprehensible and legible labels on all foods intended for the consumer. These labels needed to include information on the nutritional composition of food in terms of energy and certain nutrients (such as fats, saturated fatty acids, carbohydrates, sugars, proteins and salt), as well as the presence of allergens.

In short

AKTINA A.S.B.L.

Company: Aktina
Type: Non-profit association
Market: Belgium

GS1 Belgium & Luxembourg

GS1 GDSN-Certified Data Pool: My Product Manager, GS1 Belgilux

Sector: FMCG, Foodservice, Do-It-Yourself, Garden & Pet, Healthcare

The Aktina BATRA app helps consumers better understand the terms, ratings and graphics on food labels, so they can shop thoughtfully and with confidence.

The Aktina BATRA app helps consumers better understand the terms, ratings and graphics on food labels, so they can shop with confidence and thoughtfulness. In addition to offering BATRA users food label information, the mobile and web app also provides awareness and training modules on how to decipher food labels.

"By using the product information that has been put into the GS1 GDSN by brand owners themselves," explains Heyman, "we can ensure full transparency for Belgian consumers. Obviously, we display all the INCO-mandatory information. But if the nutritional values are available in GS1 GDSN, we present them too. That way our users can calculate nutrition information based on their portion size."

In some cases where non-compulsory product data is missing from the GS1 GDSN product information, Aktina will retrieve data from other collaborative platforms, as part of its mission to offer complete product information. When this happens, however, the application warns the user that the data may not be 100% reliable because it does not come directly from the brand owner.

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Technical Manager, Aktina

Personalised notifications

BATRA also allows users to create personalised settings and notifications. For example, consumers can request to be alerted if a product contains a certain allergen. They can also ask to be informed if the AFSCA, Belgium's Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain, has issued a recall on a product being scanned—or even on a product the user has scanned at some point in the past.

Formerly passive consumers now in charge

"So many of today's consumers aspire to eat more locally and more sustainably," notes Heyman, "For example, we can see that one of the most sought-after types of information on BATRA is the country of origin of food items. We feel suppliers have a duty to be more forthcoming and more transparent about the ingredients and origin of their products."

Consumers today also want information that cannot fit on a label, like photos, videos and more. Heyman sees this as another opportunity for brand owners to be transparent with consumers: "Show photos and videos of the farmers, of the production process, of the packaging," he urges suppliers. "Show where you get your ingredients, show your hygiene and safety inspection results, show your sustainability labels and certifications." Data, he notes, is the new gold.

With BATRA, consumers can be alerted if products contain allergens or if they have been recalled.

Claude Heyman's requests of brand owners

Plugged into consumer expectations as he is, Claude Heyman has some requests of and some advice for food manufacturers.

His main plea: "Fill in all the fields when you add products to the GS1 GDSN!" Many of the non-mandatory fields are in fact very important to consumers.

Heyman wants to encourage brand owners to use their products' GTINs in any interactions with AFSCA: "If you include a GTIN of recalled products, it can really boost efficiency and safety."

Heyman also asks supermarket chains to add their private-label product information to the GS1 GDSN.

Finally, Heyman calls on manufacturers and brand owners to provide a way for consumers to connect with them directly. "Share your social network handles and the URL of your e-commerce website," he says. "Take advantage of all the current means of communication to highlight your products and your efforts." Heyman promises that if brands make this effort, Aktina will help it reach consumers in Belgium, saying, "BATRA will continue to be active in creating this direct link between the consumer and the supplier."

BATRA is an excellent example of how the GS1 GDSN can be part of B2B2C strategies, serving the needs of business, brands and manufacturers all while they, in turn, serve the needs of end-consumers.

When product content is accessible and accurate, your business wins

Interested in GS1 GDSN? Get in touch with one of its data pools ▶