

'We deliver the most efficacious and purest supplements on the planet': Eric Gripentrog, CEO of **Kirkman**<sup>®</sup>

*"Nearly every supplement we produce is hypoallergenic and designed for people with dietary sensitivities. For this reason, almost all of our supplements are free of artificial colors, flavors, and sweeteners."*



Eric Gripentrog, CEO

**K**irkman<sup>®</sup> is an industry leader in the manufacturing of nutritional supplements. The company has been in business since 1949. It offers the purest, most up-to-date, and highest-quality dietary supplements for children, adults, and people with dietary sensitivities and special requirements. It works with leading researchers, doctors, and scientists to develop these products with the best balance of nutrients in dosages that are easy to administer. The majority of its products are hypoallergenic (free of additives like colorings and flavorings, to which many consumers are sensitive) and free of the FDA's nine major food allergens (milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soy, and sesame).

Eric Gripentrog, CEO of Kirkman, spoke exclusively to the CIO bulletin about how his company

manufactures their high-quality nutritional supplements for everyone.

## Interview Highlights

***Why was the company established? And how did the idea of manufacturing nutritional supplements occur back in the 1940s?***

The idea of the "vitamin pill" became a reality in the early 20th century. It was in the 1940s when these supplements became available at a fraction of the cost that they were only a few years earlier. This was the beginning of Kirkman as it is known today.

Lyle Wellman and Bill Graham founded Kirkman Labs (now Kirkman) in 1949 in Seattle, Washington. In 1967, it was sold to Stan Bachman, who relocated

the company to Portland, Oregon. It was in the late 1960s when Kirkman was recognized as a trailblazer of supplements for a particular group of people with dietary sensitivities with Super Nu-Thera.

***Can your company make supplements without unnecessary excipients?***

Our supplements are hypoallergenic and designed for people with dietary sensitivities. For this reason, almost all of our supplements are free of artificial colors, flavors, and sweeteners. We subscribe to using natural colorings and flavorings wherever possible, many derived from fruits and vegetables, like blueberry, raspberry, and mango. All our plant-based capsules are gelatin-free (made from hypromellose), making many of our supplements available for consumption by vegetarians and vegans.

## About | Eric Gripentrog

Eric Gripentrog, CEO of Kirkman, combines over 30 years of experience in the Consumer-Packaged Goods industry (“CPG”). Previously, he worked with three other companies in the CPG space, holding several positions, including CEO, SVP, and other senior management positions, including Board Member. From 2020 until the present, Eric is currently acting as the CEO of Hemptown USA, a director of HT Naturals, and a director of HTO Nevada, dba Kirkman. Eric’s experience in developing strategic plans and policies to bring the company vision to reality, implementing supporting plans, budgeting and forecasting, communicating with the Board of Directors, tracking company performance, and establishing a high performing working culture will enable him to succeed in his current CEO role.

### ***Do you stay on top of the ever-changing supplement industry trends?***

We watch the trends and try to tailor our products to fit current demand. Because we design so many of our products for diet-sensitive people, we endeavor to create products that are suitable for the general market as well as those that might have issues taking the “*latest trend in supplements.*”

One such example is our new line of mushroom-based products. We have taken elements from these incredible sources and created three new formulations addressing Gut Health, Energy & Endurance, and Mental Clarity & Focus. And with the surge of sleep aids hitting the market (the vast majority containing melatonin), we created an Herbal Sleep Aid made from natural sources that have been shown to be effective for centuries. This blend is melatonin-free, so people who have issues with melatonin can take it.

### ***How do you stay ahead of the competition in a market flooded with nutritional supplement manufacturers?***

We cannot address our success without mentioning our loyal customer base. Having designed so many effective products addressing specific diets from early childhood to adulthood, we have literally “*raised many individuals from childhood to adulthood.*” The reason

that these loyal customers stay with us for so long is that they have experienced the proven benefits of Kirkman’s clean, pure, bioavailable, and allergen-free supplements.

Kirkman is specifically known for its line of probiotics that rate higher than most others for containing effective live cultures, whereas many other over-the-counter probiotic supplements only sustain a small percentage of these living cultures from the factory to the store shelf. When it comes down to it, delivering proven, Ultra Tested® products to a health-conscious community helps keep us ahead of the curve. Though developed for diet-sensitive people, it quickly became evident that everyone could benefit from Kirkman’s easily absorbed, bioavailable supplements.

### ***How have you been helping people living with dietary sensitivities?***

Bernard Rimland, a world-renowned innovator and doctor to those on the autism spectrum, approached Kirkman in the 1960s. He addressed many dietary issues that his patients were experiencing with allergens, absorption, and other issues. We created Super Nu-Thera, a multivitamin that comes in a variety of delivery mediums and flavors, making it easier to administer to children. Along with Super Nu-Thera, we developed a number of other vitamins, minerals, probiotics, amino acids, and so on that proved to be particularly

effective for those on the spectrum. Almost all of these supplements were free of the top nine allergens outlined by the FDA (milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soy, and sesame), to which many of his patients were sensitive.

Our collaboration with Dr. Rimland put us on a new path to collaborate with doctors, researchers, and pharmacists from all over the world to design products that meet the specific needs of these professional advisors and our customers. As the news spread, doctors within these communities, all over the globe, began recommending Kirkman supplements to their patients. Over the past five decades, we have developed more than 400 formulations of supplements—multivitamins, digestive health, and in many dietary and behavioral health categories.

### ***With 70 years of working as the manufacturer of nutritional supplements, you must have encountered some major ups and downs. How have the challenges helped you reach success?***

One of the largest challenges Kirkman has faced was the cessation of production of raw materials, the slowing of shipping channels, and the hurdles of obtaining product during the COVID-19 pandemic. At its onset, worldwide manufacturing of many raw materials simply

stopped. With nearly the entire world “on-hold,” shipping any available products became a slow and increasingly-expensive task. Dibs on the limited available product were given to the large corporate manufacturers over the smaller companies, which Kirkman was considered to be. A large problem for Kirkman was obtaining the superior grade of cultures to make our line of probiotics, which amounts to approximately 15% of the company’s total sales.

Kirkman has a very strict basis for obtaining its high-grade, superior, clean, and pure raw materials from trusted sources. Because of its integrity and promise to its customers, Kirkman was left with very few alternative sources. Also, the cost of these raw materials increased by as much as 400%–500%, not to mention the skyrocketing shipping and import costs. Nevertheless, Kirkman did not raise its prices to consumers during the first year and a half of the pandemic, sticking to prices set nearly five years before the outbreak.

To be fair, Kirkman began to “ration” its available products to its business-to-business and direct-to-consumer customers. Our sales team did an incredible job of delivering products fairly and “as-needed” to all its customers and did not deliver only when delivery was impossible. It is partially because of this integrity, fair distribution, and concern for its customers that Kirkman’s customer base remained loyal throughout this trying time.

***Take us through the technology or “difference makers” that enabled Kirkman to exist.***

Kirkman prides itself on providing the cleanest and purest supplements on the market. With our registered trademark Ultra Tested®, we have a proprietary testing protocol that exceeds the FDA requirements to ensure we deliver the most efficacious and purest supplements on the planet. Our brand is built on

the execution of testing protocols for the lowest detectable limits of heavy metals and contaminants. Executing hundreds of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in our facility is essential for strict compliance with these testing measures. Whether the product is delivered in the form of a capsule, tablet, liquid, powder, or cream, we guarantee that it is 100% pure.

What makes Kirkman different from other manufacturers is the ‘bar’ for quality. Not only do we validate all of our vendors; materials, components, and suppliers; we continually check quality throughout the manufacturing process. Materials and components are checked and inspected upon receipt for physical damage, and checked for potency and contamination during inspection. In-process checks are performed a minimum of three times per hour to ensure the quality is verified and maintained. A single product is quality checked up to 15 times during its production cycle.

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