

Making Produce A-peel-ing

by Johnny Cupcakes

There's an entire world of produce out there. I was brought in to speak to the largest produce companies about marketing and branding. One issue they face is how to market something with so little real estate. With most produce having just a fingernail-sized sticker on their skin, how do you give produce character, a connection with the customer, and turn it into a more recognizable brand?

If I had a produce company, I'd have those little stickers made in the design and shape of eyeballs! How fun would that be?! If I owned a grocery store, I'd display some produce in wheelbarrows to hit home the feeling of freshness. I'd also be sure to share stories from farmers and growers. Everyone has a story, and it's something that breaks down the barrier between the consumer and the product. Giving customers more information about the product keeps them in the store longer, and increases their chance of making a transaction.

Cuties Clementines and Chiquita Bananas are produce companies who have done a fantastic job with making their products memorable with branding. If you strip the packaging and the name, most customers wouldn't know the difference. Wonderful Pistachios brand takes the cake for their bold humor, branding, and clever marketing campaigns.

From conversing with attendees, I learned grocery stores are looking to mix up their offerings for customers. Retailers have a lot to juggle, from customer engagement, logistics and management, to advertising and overheads. I know in retail many successful clothing and grocery stores have developed their own in-house brands. This helps them to be quick and self-reliant, and better able to customize their offering for customers, all while having a larger profit margin. The other concern comes from the produce brands. How can companies go straight to their customers? Some brands face extinction as they fight for floor space at grocery stores. This also reminds me of retail and the fashion industry. Many brands become so reliant on wholesale orders from stores that they put themselves in a tough position being at the mercy of others.

The tables could turn anytime a store decides to carry a new brand instead of yours, and if the store faces financial troubles they may not pay you or order again, and most importantly, you have no idea how your products are going to be displayed or represented. If it's not the right partnership, the experience could be lost. In my opinion, the experience is the heartbeat of a brand. Maya Angelou said it best – "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

It was pretty surreal seeing pages of notes being taken by the largest produce companies. Who knows, by one degree of separation, I might have an influence on your future produce purchases! Better yet, maybe I'll throw in the towel on this T-shirt business to be a watermelon farmer! Perhaps in another lifetime. For now, I'll make T-

shirts with produce on them.

Keep Creating,

–Johnny Cupcakes

@JohnnyCupcakes