

Marketing Munchie Podcast Series

Transcript Episode 2: Branding Herbs and Vegetables

Dr. Bridget Behe: Hi. Welcome to podcast number two of Connect-2-Consumer. I'm your host Doctor Bridget Behe.

Today, we're going to talk about an interesting product-oriented topic, branding. There's been a lot of interest in the industry recently about whether brands are effective, are they really worth the money, are consumers paying attention to them. Whether we're talking about store brands, or national brands, branding is certainly a topic of interest lately. In 2015, we started to do some research on branding.

Let me give you a little bit of background, before I give you some of the research results. The American Marketing Association would say that a brand is a name, a term, a design, a symbol, or any other feature that helps identify or separate one seller's goods and services from another.

Brands are relatively new to the horticulture industry, but they have been around for about 100 years for many other products. We know from research outside the horticulture industry that consumers use very few pieces of information to make a decision, and often brand is one of those, price is another one.

We know a little bit about horticultural brands from some work that Alba Collart did at Texas A&M. She was able to demonstrate that people who shopped weekly, or monthly, had higher brand awareness than individuals who shopped a little bit less often. But outside of that, we really don't have a very good understanding of the role that brands play in the consumers' decision process.

Another piece to this research was the influence that age has on branding awareness and brand recognition. We know that the Baby Boomer age cohort has been a mainstream core customer segment for a couple of generations, and there is a little bit of concern about how to get some of the younger age cohorts interested in horticulture interested in plants.

We showed consumers digitally identical pictures of tomato, and pepper, and basil, and parsley. We put those plants in a four-inch container and varied the color. It was either white, dark green, or yellow. Then, we showed them plants that either had one of three national brands, or a generic container. The prices of the plants were either \$0.99, \$1.49, or \$1.99.

Overall, we saw consumers had the highest brand recognition for Brand P, and that happened to be the youngest brand in the study. The oldest brand in the study had slightly less brand awareness. Now, one reason for this might be because Brand P is primarily a flowering plant brand, where brands L and M were primarily vegetable brands. Even though we presented all of these brands on vegetables, I think the reason that we had highest brand recognition among Brand P was because that's a brand that many more Baby Boomers had seen.

The second key finding was that overall branded plants were preferred to unbranded plants. Again, I have to stress, these are digitally identical plants, shown on a computer screen, and yet, we were able to see a significant difference between the branded plants and unbranded plants, in terms of consumer perceptions of them.

We also found a difference in the perception on the minds of Gen X and Gen Y, people who participate in the study compared to Boomers. For them, branding had the most significant effect. The younger age cohorts were more influenced by a plant brand more likely to buy, compared to the Boomers. What that means is in the minds, especially of some of the younger age cohorts that were trying to recruit to horticulture, that branding can make a real difference.

In our study, we used primarily national brands, but I think this could apply too to local brands or store brands, especially where the name of the business is very strongly associated, or strongly tied to the high quality of the product. In this particular study, we found some pretty compelling evidence that branding does make a difference, especially to younger age consumers, who are buying vegetable and herb transplants.

If you'd like to have more details about the study, you can look on the Connect-2-Consumer website, and find the article that's called *Age Cohort Influences Brand Recognition, Awareness, and Likelihood to Buy Vegetable and Herb Transplants*.

That's all for this week. I hope to see you next week at www.connect-2-consumer.com.