Developing and Marketing a Brand

NRAC / MAIC April 8, 2010

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The Moonstone Oyster Brand

MOONSTONE OYSTERS®

After 15 years - recognized nationally
Adds about 5 cents to the product (8%)
Carries an entire product line with it
Secrets of Success

- Passion for quality
- Persistence
- Fortuitous choice of a name
- Stickler for quality
- Hard work
- Manic about quality
- Sheer dumb luck
- Oh Yeah - QUALITY!
Selling vs. Marketing

• The difference between being the price taker and the price maker.

• Also the difference between economic success and failure.
Are you Marketing the Product, Brand or Category?

**Product** – great tasting, high-quality oyster

**Brand** – name, image, service, logo, reputation, consistency, sales assistance….

**Category** – Farm raised oysters – heart healthy, good for the environment, sustainable, high in minerals, local, fresh…
What is a Brand?

- A trade name and logo that is associated with a product or service
- Reinforced by logo shape and color
- Promotes the product and the category
- Can take years to establish—not built overnight
- Easily destroyed
22 Immutable Rules of Branding
(Ries and Ries 1998)

- Generic brand names fail
  (Pets.com, General Video Rental vs Blockbuster)
- Consistency - always and forever
- Singularity of focus and message
- Promotion vs. Advertizing (identify your market and tailor your message to your target)
- Too many extensions can dilute a brand (Miller Lite, Genuine Draft, Reserve, High Life, Reserve Amber)
Try to avoid excessive local competition - get your product out on the market, across the country

Excessive local competition only drives down prices

Don’t compete on price unless you are the “low-cost producer” the Wallmart of oyster producers

Find another feature that sets your product apart
How Will You Set Yourself Apart?

- **Service** - can you be better than the competition? Faster, more dependable?
- **Salesmanship** - Are you passionate? Are you convincing? Persistent?
- **Price** - can you afford to be the low-cost provider? Are your costs lower?
- **Product** - How is your product unique? Sexy? Healthy? Sustainable?
What does the consumer want?

- Quality
- Consistency
- Cleanliness
- Shape
- Flavor
- Catchy Name

- Year-round availability
- Timely shipping
- Attractive packaging
- Food safety
- Sustainability
- Low price
Quality is the Key

Quality: The race for quality has no finish line—so technically, it’s more like a death march.
Quality is the Key

- Set high standards and keep them high.
- Perform regular quality control.
- Ask for feedback - listen don’t argue.
- Pack the box as if every oyster has your name on it and your reputation rides on every one - it does.
- Sell the ugly ones under a different name.
- If quality is off, stop shipping.
• Chefs want predictable size, not a range
• They want to know how many will fill a plate - every time
• Some want large and some want small - find out and give them what they want
• Cull, sort and sell multiple size grades
Shape

- They want a deep cup and uniform shape
- Don’t try and slip in a few snaggly ones
- If they have a reverse hinge or no cup throw them back or shuck them or sell them to Joe’s Clam Shack, not your high-priced customer
• Pressure washing costs a fraction of a cent and can add 5-10 cents to the price
• This is food, it is going in someone’s mouth
• Save the chefs labor
• Box smells better when they open it
• Federal law requires removal of sediment
Food Safety

- Society has zero tolerance for illness
- Test your own waters
  - Marketing tool
  - Protection from lawsuits
- **Keep product cool**
- Harvest early or late in the day and rush to the walk-in cooler
- One illness and your trademark is trash
Freshness

- Get your product to the market as fast as possible
- As growers we can leave product in the water in trays and harvest only what we have orders for that day
- Harvest, pack and ship on the same day if possible
- Frequent delivery means less need for customers to hold inventory
There is little you can do about this except use the uniqueness as a marketing tool.

Get some wine snobs together - feed them oysters and ask them to come up with fancy adjectives to help describe and market your oysters.

Salty, briny, sweet - all overused.
• If your oyster is low in salt - emphasize how it lets the other flavors shine through - turn it into a positive

• Emphasize how different flavors are an asset - challenge consumers to sense the differences - “meroir”

• Wine pairings, tastings
Year-round availability

- Modulate the harvest and supply to meet demand so you can maintain markets
- When you shut a customer off he will find a replacement. - When you come back you have to earn that customer back again
- Consider planting some triploids to avoid summer quality issues
- The goal is to get your name on the menu!
• Clean well-designed packaging
• Wax box is $1.75 - $2.50
• Onion sacks are for sellers
• The box art is another opportunity to tell customers why your product is special and why they pay so much
• A waterproof flyer inside is another great marketing tool
Entering New Markets

Define your target metro area
Ensure you can get your product there
Locate the 3-5 most prestigious locales
Go there - make the sale
Get your product on their menu
Selling Direct vs. Wholesale

- Permits, HACCP, facilities, delivery truck expenses, overhead, work
- Weekly calls - lots of road trips
- Money collection - keep a tight rein
- No wholesaler will be as passionate about your product as you are
- Good weekly feedback from chefs
- Ask for recommendations!
Selling Direct vs. Wholesale

• Above a certain volume direct sales are challenging
• Can put you at odds with wholesalers
• Need to give your wholesaler a margin if you sell into two levels of the market

• Selling wholesale does not mean you can stop marketing!
How do you set a price?

- What the market will bear
- Don’t sell yourself short
- If customers are not complaining, your price is probably too low
- If a customer is complaining too loudly, then you might need to find a new customer
- Keep raising prices until you cannot sell out before the next crop comes in
What’s in a Name?

Good marketing and a great, consistent product can sell any name.

Good names evoke images of clean water, European or exotic locales, fruit & gemstones.

Lesser choices are names that are not memorable or pronounceable or which evoke less desirable images.
A little sexy innuendo helps

Nature’s Stimulus Package

Nature’s Viagra®

Eat Oysters - Love Longer

Test Subject for Aphrodisiac Studies

“We need more data”
- Worked with Monterey Bay Seafood Watch and Chef’s Collaborative
- ECSGA and many states formulating BMPs, ECOPs
- WWF Dialogs to foster sustainability certification
- Instead of increasing consumption of “green” species – may be limiting consumption of all fish.
Certification

- Eco-labels, sustainability certification, organic, MSC, ACC, WWF, Ecofish, etc...
- Only a tiny fraction of the public is aware, while many are confused
- Unclear if “market advantage” will pay for cost of certification
- Being driven by large buyers
Certification

- Need for harmonization of standards
- Unclear if “market advantage” will pay for cost of certification
- Question of who will defend the “brand”
- “Fresh”, “nutritious”, “safe” - all good selling points
Never Stop Marketing

Shirts, hats, t-shirts
bumper stickers
Giveaways, auctions
Tradeshows, sports events
Talks, presentations
Press releases, op-ed articles
Site visits, farm tours
Web site, Facebook
Train your staff too

Direct mail and print advertising, radio and TV?
Consider your market - what is the most cost effective way to reach the buyer?
brand protection

- Check your customers. If they are not handling your product well it reflects on your brand.
- Read what others are saying online - blogs, Google alerts
- Get a trademark!
- Be alert for brand theft or fraud - trademark abuse
Random ideas

Tail-gate parties
College parties – (start them young – peer pressure)
Get “shellfish virgins” to try their first one
Pairings with local wine producers
Web site – recipe of the month, specials
Differentiate shellfish farming from salmon – the anti-salmon campaign spends millions
How big is the “market”?
If we continue to increase production without concurrent marketing we risk price collapse (tilapia, salmon, catfish, clams)
Is the industry willing to support a generic marketing campaign?
How do we access the vast latent market of mid-west shellfish “virgins”
Questions?

East Coast Shellfish Growers Association

Representing growers from Maine to Florida

Marketing the category

LISTSERVE

www.ECSGA.org