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Terry Splane

The Importance of Listening

One of the most important things we can do in business and in life is to listen, to really listen. For your California Avocado Commission marketing team, “listening” occurs year-round through in-person interactions including phone calls, meetings, events and other gatherings, as well as through research and consumer engagement (website, social media). What we learn helps CAC build programs that will resonate with customers and consumers, and those programs encourage demand and preference for California avocados.

California avocado growers are our constituents, so listening to them is paramount. The Commission actively and intently listens to growers at Board and Committee meetings, annual meetings and through myriad group and individual communications. The marketing staff members at key meetings observe, take notes and consolidate information based on what is said by attendees. As a team we share and discuss findings and learn from that information. When there is clear direction from the Board, we build that into our plans and actions.

When marketing does planning, we encourage creative ideas. Some ideas are wonderful, others a bit wild, but it is important to entertain even crazy ideas to find the true gems. And

sometimes the “out there” ideas – with a little tweaking and adjusting – become the big idea. We use input from growers and the Board as a filter for what programs and communications actually make it to the final marketing plan.

Customers – retailers, foodservice operators and their suppliers – are the ultimate gatekeepers determining if California avocados will be in distribution. If customers don’t want California avocados, consumers won’t have the opportunity to buy them. So, it is critical that we listen to our customers and potential customers to determine and meet their needs.

The CAC marketing team, especially the retail marketing directors and the foodservice team, meets with customers on a regular basis and conveys key learnings to the full team. Last year and this season we are hearing that many customers want to share with their consumers about their sustainability programs. Therefore, they appreciate the Commission’s communications regarding California avocados being locally grown and sustainably farmed. We also listen to and act on customer requests for materials that help them promote California avocados, which range from display bins and point-of-sale signage to videos, recipes and photos. Some customers are most interested in assets featuring California

avocado growers and groves, while for others “lifestyle” communication fits better with their marketing strategies.

Ultimately consumers are king, so we must have a pulse on their wants and needs. The Commission regularly conducts surveys of avocado consumers to track their awareness of avocado origins and advertising as well as their perceptions on assorted topics. Some of the annual business plan key performance indicators are measured via CAC’s consumer tracking study and other information from the study informs our objectives, strategies and action plans.

CAC and its marketing agencies keep an ear to the ground to discover consumer opinions, trends and topics of concern. These days, grocery shoppers are concerned about the cost of what is in their shopping baskets and some say they are cutting back. We have yet to see this play out with lower demand for avocados, but it is important to be aware of this concern. Targeted California avocado consumers also tend to be very interested in locally grown produce and sustainability, and that information has informed our new marketing campaign.

Since I joined the Commission one of the key things our team heard and acted upon was the need for a new agency to refresh the thought, strategy and campaign. We partnered

with Curious Plot and have made significant strides evolving our consumer communications. We heard from growers that we needed to make the brand, California, even more prominent in communications, in all touch points. Within the new campaign there is significant value in focusing on locally grown and the California growers who deliver an amazing consumer experience. Finally, there is a big opportunity to attach sustainability to the brand, because it matters to our customers and consumers, and was conceived by growers. That said, we need to ensure what we communicate about sustainability aligns with grower realities.

I learned early on in business, the sum of one is never as great as the sum of many and I live by this today. Listening is valuable. Listening is vital for the business. We're listening to the people who buy California avocados and we are listening to you. 🥑



Gaining insights from foodservice operators during a California avocado grove tour.



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