



In the Marketing Trenches with Whole Foods

By Mike Gospe

Nowhere are [persona building](#) and [market blueprints](#) more obvious than in the retail sector. Recently, we had the opportunity to chat with Maureen Everett, a marketing team leader with Whole Foods, and we asked about her marketing programs and best practices.

As the marketing team leader for the Redwood City store, Maureen's duties focus on bringing in more customers to her store. Whole Foods is a natural and organic grocery store with more than 270 stores in North America and the United Kingdom. Despite the company's international presence, each store is encouraged to nurture its own entrepreneurial spirit as they cater to their local community. With that in mind, Maureen has designed a programmatic approach to building and nurturing a relationship with her customers. In addition, Maureen's vision is to give back to the local community – by supporting the Redwood City Education Foundation and other organizations such as food banks and the Salvation Army.

Persona Building

One of her challenges is in dealing with the broad demographic mix of her many customers. While she admits there is no "one size fits all" customer type, she has become adept at identifying a number of personas who have specific needs, including:

- The frantic mom with kids in tow
- The "locavore" organic shopper
- The cost-conscious family shopper

Demographics also play a key role, as her store straddles affluent, middle-income, and lower-income communities. Each persona has their own interests and shopping preferences, and Maureen has learned to become hyper-sensitive when designing store events. As she says, “I had the bread, now I know what to put in the sandwiches!” Figuratively and literally.

Marketing Blueprints & Program Design

As routine grocery shoppers, we may take for granted the various store displays, coupons, and offers. But this is far from random. Maureen’s marketing programs are carefully designed to draw in the right type of customer for specific items. Many of her programs are designed around special events, holidays, and occasions with the marketing blueprint beginning one to two weeks prior to the event. Special attention is put on pre-sales activities to drive awareness and interest of the actual event. Adding complexity, she has to be careful not to over-promote any event. While coupons are limitless, she needs to carefully balance the size of any event to cater to an optimum number of participating customers. Running out of food early at a tasting can be just as costly as supplying so much food that customers come expecting to dine when they should just be sampling.

Examples of Maureen’s events include:

- Valentines Day
- El Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)
- Events conducted in partnership with local schools
- Holiday events (Christmas tree sales, sustainable ornaments, cookie decorating)
- Tasting events

And promotion of these events is limited only by the bounds of her imagination. In addition to in-store displays and coupons, Maureen is using social media to drive store traffic.

- [Store Facebook fan page](#): providing exclusive offers to her fans
- [Store Twitter account](#): pointing her followers to recipes, invitations to store events, and special coupons
- [Yelp](#): allowing her to continuously monitor feedback from customers

Measures of Success

Does all this work? “Absolutely!” she says. “We’re measured on transaction amounts and basket size. And, we have the ability to track our success daily, showing direct linkage between our events and programs and store revenue. Using the [persona and blueprint best practices](#) continues to help me find new ways to engage with our community.”

About the Author

[Mike Gospe](#) leads KickStart Alliance's marketing operations practice where he conducts team-based "practical application working sessions" to improve the effectiveness of lead generation campaigns and

product launches. His fun, practical approach and roll-up-his-sleeves attitude energizes teams, helping them to get "real work done" while guiding them to the next level of excellence. Mike is the author of the book, [Marketing Campaign Development](#), and his methodology is being used by San Francisco State University's College of Extended Learning course: "[Essentials of Integrated Marketing](#)."

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