

All Atwitter in Seattle

Marketing Matters 2009 focuses on social media and collaboration

BY ELLEN MICHEL

Marketing Matters 2009 took place at the Edgewater Hotel in Seattle, Wash., May 12–14, walking distance from the historic Pike Place Market. This annual gathering of marketing, outreach and owner services staff drew 55 participants from 44 co-ops.

“We carried forth many themes of the 2008 conference, with its emphasis on community and customer service,” said NCGA Director of Marketing Kelly Smith. “This year, we added a focus on social media, reflecting rapid changes in the ways we now communicate with shoppers.”

The conference began with a tour of the new LEED® platinum-certified PCC Natural Markets Edmonds location, where PCC Director of Marketing Laurie Albrecht hosted an informal reception in the classroom at the front of the store.

A trip to Central Co-op’s Madison Market in the heart of Seattle’s Capital Hill district also offered time to notice in-house branding, visit with staff members, and pick up print versions of marketing materials.

Getting up to speed with social media

Nathan Rice of Haberman and Associates opened the formal presentations with a how-to session on social media. Rice stressed the importance of having a storytelling platform for co-op messaging, offering “rules for the road” when Twittering or using Facebook and other interactive resources.

“Be authentic—that’s the most important thing to remember when managing your reputation as a persona for your store,” he said. “Think of social networking as a real-time event you are attending and participating in. Going local is more important than ever.”

Ricardo Rábago, social media specialist for PCC Markets, offered details about how he uses video and podcasting to resample co-op news. He also sends out a Twitter link to a recipe five days a week at 3 p.m., reaching nearly 3,000 followers.

Rábago and Rice offered compelling data about the rapid increase of social media use in the past year. “It’s all about participation,” explained Rábago. “Social media helps you tap into your community network to create conversations that benefit from group resources, collective skills and shared knowledge.”



Co-op marketing managers gather to critique each others’ store materials at Marketing Matters in Seattle.

Stephanie Bittner elaborated on the theme of collaboration. Vice president of marketing and business development for the nonprofit news and information service Grist (offering “astute advice to green your life” at www.grist.org), Bittner draws on her experience at Starbucks, where she helped develop and implement media strategy. She recalled digital achievements by Starbucks, from the launching of the Planet Green Game in 2007 to the Get Out the Vote campaign with free coffee for voters on November 2, 2008.

Adjusting the mix

Jeanne Lakso, of Linden Hills Co-op and Natural Home in Minneapolis, Minn., led a collaborative work session evaluating current member-owner-ship messaging.

“The session on membership materials came on the heels of our workshops on social media, so perhaps that’s why most participants favored

handouts and brochures with short, punchy copy,” Lakso said. “The time-honored trifold brochure was declared to be outmoded, and I think more than one owner services or marketing person realized that the flyer we use to promote membership is just one of many places where we have the chance to tell our co-ops’ compelling stories. I particularly appreciated the constructive feedback we were able to give one another.”

Wall-of-fame and -shame displays showed ad campaigns and promotional items, with Grain Train Natural Foods Market winning the most votes for its ads. Branded T-shirts, bags and other items were given away.

Erica Bertram, merchandising manager of Zingerman’s Delicatessen in Ann Arbor, Mich., offered insights into the creation of signs and displays. Bertram advocates creating abundant, fun displays of featured products, with effective signage and direct samples to customers. Her

session was filled with practical advice, including tips for making handmade banners.

James Stolze and Melissa Knight of eCom Systems and Joan Guettler from NCGA described new features of NCGA's Co-op Advantage Program customized flyers. Participation in the optional program involves fees-for-service to include store branding on front and back covers, and to add up to four pages to the flyer. The program provides access to a vast product image library and allows stores to upload and use their own images to create on-demand promotional pieces.

"We've added a new optional mailing program as well as an optional AdViewer program and customizable signage," Guettler explained. "You can now replace recipes in the CAP flyer with your own, or switch out the 'Fresh in the Deli' feature with a cheese piece. Phase two of the program also lets you upload up to two fonts and to switch out colors, making the program more flexible and compatible with individual store brands."

Newsletters at the core of storytelling

A member panel explored the continuing value of newsletters as the history-keeping center of store branding. Nicole Fenton from City Market/Onion River Co-op stressed the importance of consistency and relevancy, offering planning strategies and ways to think about newsletter distribution and electronic connections. Tom Vogel talked about how Seward Co-op used the occasion of a new store to update its newsletter, using the tagline "From Farmer to Franklin."

Brwyn Griffin of The Food Co-op in Port Townsend, Wash., described how a local artist's illustration of a farmer, named "Cooper" by co-op members, now lives in the store as a life-sized wooden display piece. "Cooper appears in ads, on the website and on a new Food Co-op shopping card," Griffin explained. "It all started because of an appealing illustration in the newsletter."

Customer surveys indicate that newsletters remain the storytelling hub of our stores, with an opt-in email link a postage-free way to guarantee delivery that is now accepted and desired by more co-op members. The panel agreed that coordination between newsletters and websites is more important than ever before.

Moving toward a new national brand

Katherine Jones of Milkshake Media updated the group about work with NCGA on development of a new co-op brand. Jones unveiled a number of concepts and support materials, prompting a spirited discussion about various components and themes. "We want the new brand to speak to some of the deeper reasons why people connect so strongly with co-ops," said Jones.

Kelly Smith explained that work on new branding continues to move ahead, to be ■>

A Side Dish of Marketing and Membership Tips

You can't do everything. But here are some of the great ideas that are working for other co-ops.

1. **Audit your marketing mix** to make adjustments to current fiscal realities and the rapid growth of social media. Establish goals and work towards greater participation and collaboration on the part of co-op stakeholders.
2. **Think about the importance of having a storytelling platform** for your store. Be both authentic and playful; pay attention to voice and identify speakers, writers, and Twitter personalities as real people.
3. **Use your newsletter** as the storytelling hub of your brand, evaluating delivery strategies. Coordinate it with your website, e-newsletter, social media, in-store merchandising, education series, and the CAP flyer, reinforcing monthly and seasonal themes.
4. **Use your website** to focus on traditional marketing, with information that is controlled, clear, timely and easy to navigate. Keep it fresh: archive with PDFs, and change or retire dated pieces so that they don't confuse users. Start adding videos and podcasts to your site.
5. **Make lots of friends:** Set up and maintain a Facebook page for your co-op, adding to its content on a regular basis.
6. **Use Twitter** to communicate with followers two to three times a day. An outgoing person whom shoppers meet at demos or events has the ideal Twitter persona for your store. Use Twitter for store updates, demo news, recipe links, and product tips.
7. **Consider an interactive, moderated blog** as part of your online mix. Blogs continue to deliver impact in terms of converting visitors to buyers. Blogs with a Twitter feed and regular Facebook links reach the furthest. Use them to listen to and interact with stakeholders.
8. **Review membership materials for key messages**, effective delivery of costs and benefits, and visual appeal. Invite everyone on staff to understand the co-op business model and the value of co-op ownership.
9. **Consider customizing the CAP flyer**, finding creative ways to get it and your newsletter into new markets. Remember that the CAP customization program offers a product image archive, sign-making templates, an optional AdViewer program, and the ability to create unlimited on-demand flyers.
10. **Teach about the importance of merchandising**, using effective end caps and compelling signs to sell product. Set up a regularly updated guidebook for brand elements, merchandising tips, logos, sign system protocols, key messages, prepared foods menus, and customer service standards.
11. **Identify your local brand advocates** and community champions. Cultivate partnerships, tell stories, and hold conversations around shared objectives and goals, such as supporting the local food economy, fighting for food security, and nutrition education.
12. **When using this list** to create your marketing plan, consider the advice of Jeanne Lakso of Linden Hills Co-op: "At the end of the day, there is no such thing as a marketing emergency. Much of what we do reflects wide diversity in matters of taste, and your co-op brand changes continuously over time. The most important thing is to focus on building enduring relationships, in whatever media you use to tell your story."

◀ phased in over time. “This won’t be a consensus decision,” she said, “but one that is made after doing research and gathering lots of feedback from various stakeholders.”

Smith also provided updates about the Eat Local America Challenge 2009, and showed videos from the first My Co-op Rocks! contest during an evening banquet.

As always, the conference provided opportunities to explore a new city and its restaurants, in conversation with peers. “As a new marketing manager and first-time attendee of Marketing Matters, I was amazed at the diversity of co-ops in attendance, as well as the wealth of information shared,” said Danielle Dove, marketing manager of Good Foods Market & Café in Lexington, Ky. “I came away from the conference with an abundance of ideas and wonderful contacts.”

Marketing Matters 2009 was coordinated by Kelly Smith with Mari Roseman, Kim Kusnier, Lauren Zamorano and Tim Barnes of NCGA. More information, including downloads of conference presentations, is available to NCGA members at www.ncga.coop/marketingmatters.

Robynn Shrader Elected to Board of National Banking Co-op

In April 2009, Robynn Shrader, chief executive officer for National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA), was elected to the board of directors of NCB, a national banking cooperative dedicated to strengthening communities through the delivery of banking and financial services, with an emphasis on cooperative expansion and economic development. NCB focuses on industries that support vibrant communities: housing, education, health care, cultural centers, local businesses, natural food cooperative grocers and social services. Shrader will serve through 2012 and joins the 13 other board members in providing strategic direction and leadership counsel.

Shrader has 20 years of experience in cooperative marketing, brand management and organizational development. She was the first staff person of NCGA during its formation and development, and she led the organization to its current status as a national association with nearly 40 staff positions in 10 states and the District of Columbia.

Shrader also represents food co-ops within the National Organic Coalition, is a director of New Pioneer Cooperative in the Iowa City area, and was named one of the “Top Women in Grocery” by *Progressive Grocer* magazine in 2007.

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