NWPB is Produce Business Marketing Excellence Award Winner

Each year the NWPB executes multiple creative programs with great results. This year the Board applied to the Produce Business Marketing Excellence Award program. The internal benefit of submitting NWPB programs to marketing awards is to have another opportunity to have a critical eye on NWPB programs with the ultimate goal of winning and receiving media coverage for winning the award and more industry respect for the work done by the NWPB. As announced in the August edition of Produce Business, the NWPB won! In reviewing what to submit, the staff wanted to submit a program that crossed all communications and marketing programs, and nothing does that more than nutrition messaging. The Board submitted, “Can’t Leave Water out of Watermelon,” highlighting outreach focused on watermelon’s nutrition message such as the new Dietitian Toolkit, Marine Corps Marathon, Produce for Kids, foodservice events reaching registered dietitians, and more.

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A new event was created this year by the folks behind Appetite for Health, the company of nutritionists and writers who support brands with paid placement assistance in huge national publications. The event, called Nutrition News Update, is a brand-media editor immersion that pulls influential writers, editors and freelancers representing more than 80 top-tier media outlets out of their home city to host in Scottsdale, AZ for two days of presentations. The goal? To educate and inspire, thereby earning non-paid media for watermelon. The small group was comprised of 23 attendees, who write for titles including Woman’s Day, Allure, Better Homes & Gardens, Eating Well, Reader’s Digest, Martha Stewart Living, Women’s Health, Huffington Post, WebMD, Self, Forbes, New York Times, Shape, Doctor Oz, Livestrong, Runner’s World, O, The Oprah Magazine, Brit + Co and many more.

Quick and Easy Videos – The Costco Way

In celebration of National Watermelon Month, NWPB had the opportunity to participate in a fantastic new program called Quick & Easy by retailer Costco Wholesale. The two-minute video – titled “Watermelon 2 Ways” – educated Costco members and viewers on how to cut and prepare two watermelon recipes using Costco products. The watermelon caprese salad and the watermelon lemonade were the recipes featured. The video was posted to a variety of social media platforms including Costco.com and Costco’s Facebook and Pinterest channels. In total, the video reached over 1.1 million people and had 30,938 engagements and 6,500 reactions, comments and shares. This proved to be a great promotional tool for the retailer, as an increase in sales from the previous year was reported.
Foodservice Industry Events
Inspire Watermelon Usage

Late summer is a busy time for foodservice events reaching multiple audiences and decision makers. In August, the Board sponsored the Flavor Experience. Flavor reaches mostly marketing and culinary contacts with regional and national commercial chains - a record breaking, more than 250 contacts were in attendance this year! Watermelon was featured in multiple trend-forward menu items and included in a breakout session on low/no abv cocktails. Although this is one of the larger events the Board sponsors, watermelon’s versatility really did shine throughout the event.

Also in August was the Mise Conference reaching hotel and lodging culinary contacts. The perk of this audience is that many already bring watermelon in daily for buffets and fruit sides so the opportunity is to inspire them to extend their usage. We had multiple menus items to help inspire recipe usage such as a “breakfast pizza” and savory salads, in addition to watermelon rind pickles in a pickle bar. Watermelon beverages were included throughout the event. Since this audience has catering and event opportunities, the Board featured a live carver with multiple carvings. This is a relatively new target for the Board so follow-up and next steps are ongoing and unique to each contact.

Last but not least is the third 2019 FoodOvation that took place in the beginning of September. Unlike the Flavor Experience, FoodOvation is a quality over quantity event, where the Board is paired with 12 regional and national chains for 45-minute meetings to educate and inspire watermelon usage. In June, the event was focused on noncommercial foodservice but in March and September the event is focused on commercial operators. The event hosted a good mix of culinary and purchasing contacts from quick service and full-service operators from across the country. Examples of Board pairings included McAlister’s Deli and Shake Shack. Each 45-minute meeting is catered to each chain, but topics always include how to use the whole watermelon and year-round flavor pairings. These events have already led to on-site presentations and promotions this year.
Quality Foods is a 13-store high customer service food retailer based on Vancouver Island. In conjunction with and supported by the NWPB, Quality Foods positioned USA watermelon as its primary fun, healthy and nutritious food at this year’s in-store event. Beyond educating Quality Food shoppers, USA watermelon was prominently sampled to encourage and enhance purchase behavior. To further enhance this event, the 2019 National Watermelon Queen made 5+ hour guest appearances at two store locations, helping to extol to shoppers the many health and value benefits trusted USA watermelon provides.

The popularity of and Canadian (British Columbia) consumer demand for USA watermelons is undeniable and never more so on and over the BC Family Day long weekend! In partnership with the Georgia Main Food Group (GMFG), this 29-store major independent food retailer in B.C., the NWBP undertook an exclusive retail sampling and education event conducted by master carver, Chef Joseph Poon, appeared in three (3) of GMFG’s premier Fresh St. Market banner stores over a two-day period.

During Chef Poon’s appearance in all Fresh St. Market stores, he met and greeted customers and personally carved, sampled and showcased fresh USA watermelon to shoppers. Chef Poon also made, sampled and provided recipe copies of one of the Fire & Ice Watermelon Salsa. Shoppers were also educated on how to properly select fresh watermelon at retail to ensure their best possible in-home eating enjoyment. Equally USA watermelon’s tremendous value both nutritionally and on a cost-per-serving basis compared to all other fruits was highlighted. Other POS materials were equally shared with shoppers including but not limited to brochures, coloring sheets and recipe cards. Thousands of samples of fresh USA watermelon were collectively served by Chef Poon in and over his two-day FSM appearances.
Social Media Stats Summer 2019 At a Glance

- This Summer, watermelon.org generated 185,000 sessions with an average of 1:31, which is 3x industry average for time on site.
- Most popular Facebook post was on National Watermelon Day with 22,084 impressions that included 376 shares, 58 comments and 853 likes.
- Most popular Twitter post was in response to a K-pop boy band called BTS, when one of the group members Tweeted about watermelon and we interacted, getting the attention of the BTS Army (their fan group), and our Tweet got 20,000 likes and 6500 retweets (huge engagement numbers!).
- On Instagram our best post was a regram of a Watermelon Keg carving that got 864 engagements and 21,348 impressions.
- Our Facebook page audience increased 37% over the summer.
- Instagram grew 47% over the summer to 7,791 page likes, mainly due to the Slice of Joy Instagram weekly contest.
- Pinterest is over #1 social media to site driver.
- YouTube channel – Over the summer had 40,694 video views with an average watch time of 1:54. The number one YouTube video continues to be How to Use a Melon Baller.
- YouTube Advertising, Pre-roll of the commercial, earned over 1.9 million video views, with a view rate of 50.2%, continuing to beat industry averages. Our cost per view dropped to $0.01, from $0.03.
- What About Watermelon, our consumer e-newsletter, sent out 37,698 issues over the summer with an open rate of 59.3%, open rate of 59.73%, which is up 21% from the spring metrics.

Market Basket Produce

Market Basket Produce, with 80 stores, has served the New England market for over 100 years! The produce category manager was very supportive of watermelon this year with aggressive ads, social media support and special in-store signage.
The NWPB works with Numerator for Retail Ad Tracking. Numerator’s database is a great tool that allows us to go deeper into the retail space. It uses an ad-tracking system that ensures timely analysis of what the largest chains are promoting. The data goes into a database that can run reports and queries and includes images of the ads. For example, the image above shows the weekly number of ads for each region since the start of the second quarter (April) with the weekly average price per each. This includes minis and wholes. This analysis shows where the promotional peaks in the spring/summer season are, and how promotion tends to ramp back up after the lulls that follow. You can see where Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day fall, and it gives a good idea of how prices at retail are generally higher at the start of the spring/summer season, but gradually decline especially after July 4th. The Board distributes a weekly report from the database. If you have any questions or are interested in receiving the report, please reach out to Mark Arney at marney@watermelon.org.
Chrissy Carol, RD, aka “Snacking in Sneakers” is one of the watermelon partners for 2019, creating blogs, live broadcasts and newly hosting a sponsored dinner featuring watermelon!

This amazing experience was targeted to Boston-based running and triathlon coaches as well as influential athletes in the Massachusetts area. The vision was to have a late-summer season dinner where each course is devoted to a different brand partner. As the host, Chrissy presented her insights and takeaways with regards to coaching and nutrition, and also encouraged people to share their experience on social media.

The dinner took place August 21st at the Orange Door Kitchen, and the watermelon menu items are two-fold:

- First course: Curried Watermelon Salad with Micro Cilantro, Crab, Pickled Rind, Thai Curry & Coconut Vinaigrette.

The 2019 promotional activities for U.S. watermelons in Japan kicked-off once again with participation in the annual Independence Day celebration at the U.S. Ambassador’s Residence. NWPB set up a booth at the party, serving fresh-cut U.S. watermelons to hundreds of invited guests. The theme of this year’s Independence Day celebration was space development, in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing.
Being that the NWPB office is located near the Walt Disney World Resort, we are able to participate in several festivals held at the park each year that draw visitors from all over the country. These are national in scope, and afford the opportunity to educate and engage with people, sharing inspiring recipes and carvings and answering questions one on one. As part of the hugely popular fall season event *Epcot’s International Food and Wine Festival*, Watermelon was able to secure two culinary demonstrations: specially ticketed events where guests watch a chef prepare a specific dish, on stage emceed and supported by the sponsor, and then get that plate as a tasting! This is very new for us, because the previous experiential watermelon events have prevented us from feeding the guests. But this time, they got delicious bites, and as they say, “Tasting is believing!”

- **August 31st** - Chef Nanor from the California Grill prepared a Compressed Watermelon Salad (made with yellow and red watermelon), served with Watermelon Aguachile and Pickled Watermelon Rind, with Hand-Pulled String Cheese

- **September 14th** - Chef Sean from the Wilderness Lodge prepared a Smoked Shrimp Watermelon Ceviche with Pickled Watermelon on a Puffed Tortilla
Watermelon on the Menu

Watermelon Chaat, made of mint, red onion, fennel, lime at ADYA Anaheim is on the menu year-round!

Where will NWPB be next?

Fit Foodie 5k – San Diego, CA – October 12

PMA Fresh Summit – Anaheim, CA – October 17 – 19

Fall Board Meeting – Washington, D.C. – October 26

Marine Corps Marathon – Washington, D.C. – October 27

International Foodservice Editorial Council – Madison, WI – October 28 – 30