

2/1/2025

Produce Marketing 101: Building a Brand

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There are many who think a brand is a label—slap it on the pack and it will sell itself. There is nothing further from the truth.

Here are 5 key elements to building a brand in fresh produce:

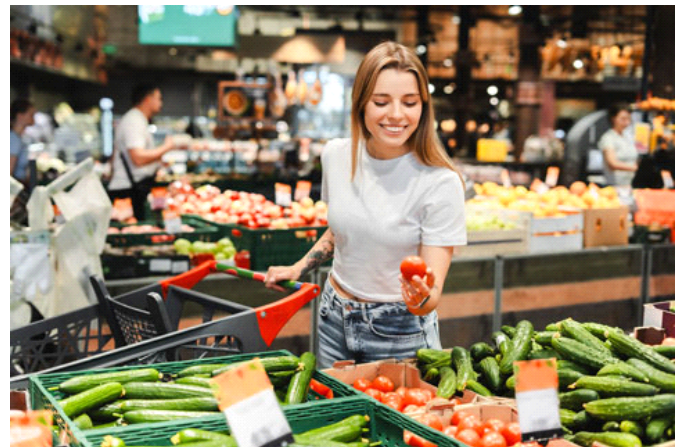
1. **Clear Brand Positioning:** Define unique functional and emotional benefits that differentiate your produce: examples include greenhouse grown, sustainably sourced, unique variety, organic.

2. **Compelling Brand Story:** Use storytelling to communicate origin, quality and sustainability; local/regional; family owned; the growing process—differentiation is key.

3. **Consumer Insights:** Understand customer (retail and consumer) preferences, trends and behaviors to tailor the messaging.

4. **Strategic Marketing Plan:** Align goals, tactics and channels (e.g., social media, in-store) for effective reach; create realistic brand promotion goals, using appropriate/manageable tactics to create awareness.

5. **Consistent Quality & Experience:** Ensure reliable product quality (flavor, shelf life, sustainable packaging) and strong retail (product or category exclusivity in a specific region) or online presence (web, social) to build trust.



Brand leaders

To be an effective brand leader in fresh produce, you need to focus on quality, authenticity and customer connection. Build trust through storytelling, sustainable practices and clear values. Adapt to trends, ensure accessibility and create memorable experiences that resonate with consumers, fostering loyalty and long-term growth.

This mind map (opposite page) from beloved-brands.com provides a helpful guide for brand leaders, showing all the key areas to focus on for success. It covers topics like understanding your customers, sharing your brand's story, planning and creating great experiences. It's a simple way to see how everything connects

in marketing. At the core is the concept of understanding the target consumer, surrounded by interconnected topics:

- **Brand Positioning:** Focuses on defining the brand's unique emotional and functional benefits, leveraging consumer insights and crafting winning concepts that resonate with the target audience.
- **Strategic Plan:** Involves creating goals, vision, strategies and tactics while aligning resources, budgets and innovation to deliver impactful results.
- **Business Results:** Emphasizes managing finances, forecasting, market results and profitability.
- **Organization Culture:** Highlights the importance of leadership, organizational structure, purpose-driven messaging, training and fostering internal values to align teams with brand objectives.
- **Consumer Experience:** Centers on consumer analytics, tracking and service to enhance the overall experience and ensure value-driven interactions.
- **Purchase Moment:** Focuses on customer acquisition, in-store experience and marketing to drive conversions and loyalty.
- **Product Innovation:** Involves brainstorming, pricing and R&D to create a robust product pipeline aligned with consumer needs.
- **Brand Story:** Stresses the importance of storytelling through owned, earned and paid media while shaping communications strategies to build trust and loyalty.

Each area is intricately linked, forming a comprehensive framework for brand leadership and market success.



Graphic courtesy of beloved-brands.com

An effective marketing mix

Building a brand in fresh produce requires a well-rounded marketing mix to differentiate your offerings in a competitive market. Below is a strategic marketing mix that aligns with the principles in the provided framework:

Product—The product is the foundation of the marketing mix; ensure high-quality, fresh and sustainably grown products that meet consumer preferences. Focus on attributes like taste, nutritional value, organic certification or unique

varieties that set your produce apart. Highlight benefits such as health, freshness and farm-to-table sourcing in your branding to resonate with modern consumers seeking transparency and quality.

Price—Pricing strategies should reflect the quality and uniqueness of your products while remaining competitive. Use a value-based pricing model, emphasizing the benefits of premium-quality, organic, local or sustainably sourced produce. Offer tiered pricing options, such as bulk discounts or special promotions, to appeal to a range of customer segments. Ensure transparency in pricing to build trust.

Place—Distribution is critical for fresh produce, where quality and shelf life can deteriorate quickly. Establish partnerships with local and regional grocery stores, in-season farmers' markets and wholesalers/distributors to ensure widespread availability. Focus on in-store experiences by working with retailers to showcase your brand through sampling opportunities; positive sampling experiences can drive an immediate sale.

Promotion—Promotion is key to building brand awareness and trust. Develop a compelling brand story that highlights your commitment to sustainability, local farming or family traditions. Share this story through a mix of owned, earned and paid media.

- **Social Media Marketing:** Use platforms like Instagram and Facebook (to start) to showcase your produce with appealing visuals and recipes, connecting emotionally with consumers about how it's grown, where and by whom.
- **Content Marketing:** Publish blogs or videos educating customers on the benefits of fresh produce and how to incorporate it into their daily lives. YouTube continues to be the No. 1 search engine worldwide!
- **Influencer Partnerships:** Collaborate with local chefs, food bloggers or health influencers to amplify your reach; allow others to be your brand's megaphone.
- **Community Engagement:** Sponsor community events, farmer education programs or health initiatives to build goodwill and local brand loyalty; get involved with local schools—you are a fantastic science project topic!

Your People—Train your team to deliver excellent customer service (internal: inter-department; external: retail buyers, suppliers) and ensure a consistent brand experience. From sales staff to production workers to accounting team members to transportation and every department in between, everyone should embody the brand's values. Foster an organizational culture focused on sustainability, innovation and consumer satisfaction.

Process—Establish efficient systems for picking, packing and delivering produce to ensure freshness and shelf life. Supply chain efficiencies play an integral role in brand delivery; you might grow and market a great product but if there are constant speed bumps and roadblocks in the delivery, it is all for not.

The Big Picture (What People See)—Your brand's visual elements—like packaging, website, displays, and even your social media presence—are part of what builds trust. Eco-friendly packaging, clear labeling or even QR codes that link to your story can show customers your commitment to transparency and quality.

By exploring and integrating some of these ideas, a fresh produce company can craft a brand that feels authentic, resonates with customers and builds lasting loyalty. There's no one-size-fits-all approach, so it's all about finding what works best for your target audience(s).

To recap

Building a brand in fresh produce is about more than selling fruits and vegetables—it's about creating trust, loyalty and a meaningful connection with your customers. In a competitive market, consumers seek more than just fresh products; they want authenticity, quality and a brand that aligns with their values, like health, sustainability and transparency.

A strong brand helps differentiate your offerings, showcasing what makes your produce unique—whether it's locally grown, organic or part of a farm-to-table story. Sharing your journey through storytelling and consistent

branding builds trust and allows customers to connect emotionally with your company.

Focusing on elements like quality products, transparent pricing and seamless availability ensures your produce stands out while making it accessible and convenient for customers. Engaging promotions and thoughtful customer interactions—both in-store and online—foster a positive reputation and word-of-mouth growth.

A strong brand also creates long-term value, helping you adapt to trends, explore new markets and cultivate loyal customers who choose your produce over competitors. By blending creativity, authenticity and customer focus, your brand becomes more than just a label—it becomes a trusted choice in the fresh produce aisle.

Marketing is never one-size-fits-all; it requires tailored strategies that resonate with unique and specific audiences and adapt to their evolving needs.

Chris Veillon is a seasoned strategic marketer specializing in brand, product and market development. Known for his thought leadership and award-winning marketing initiatives, Chris leverages digital and social media to drive brand differentiation in controlled environment agriculture (CEA). His commitment to inspiring conversations and pioneering change continues to push the boundaries of strategic marketing.