

# Collaborative Strategies for Brand Management

## Marketing Matters 2013

BY ELLEN MICHEL

“There are no marketing emergencies,” Jeanne Lakso announced decisively at *Marketing Matters 2013*, the National Cooperative Grocers’ Association (NCGA) conference she helps design on topics relevant to co-op marketing and communications. Her calm observation sent a ripple of knowing laughter through the crowd gathered in the grand ballroom of the historic Georgian Terrace Hotel in Atlanta in mid-May 2013.

No marketing emergencies? Let’s talk about handwritten signs, conflicting deadlines, limited capacity, mixed messages, font chaos in the grocery aisle. All of these and more may indeed be serious, but they can, with the right tools, teamwork, and insights, become manageable challenges and opportunities for success.

*Marketing Matters* provides time to focus intently on brand development. It offers two days of workshops and panels, with an optional full-day Boot Camp designed for new marketers and those seeking a refresher.

“We try to focus content on ways that co-ops’ marketing staff can help support sustainable growth for their organizations and communities,” Lakso explains. “I always look for speakers and peer presenters who can provide a nice balance of inspiration and practical tools for our attendees.”

### Boot camp basics

Marketing Boot Camp opened with a session on the fundamentals of co-op ownership, with Shannon Szymkowiak of Whole Foods Co-op (Duluth, Minn.), and Joann Tomasulo of Lexington Food Co-op (Buffalo, N.Y.). Both offered examples of how to communicate regarding owner benefits.

Ben Nauman, NCGA director of purchasing, offered “Priced to Compete,” a workshop designed to help marketers support merchandisers and buyers. He stressed the value of building a collaborative strategy to publicize about price in relation to co-op differentiators and the competitive landscape.

NCGA graphic designer Serina Sulentenic focused on “Elements of Good Graphic Design.” She emphasized the importance of selecting fonts and colors that support the evolution of durable brand assets, sharing essential technical tips to provide a foundation for visual messaging.

A session by Ric Tedford addressed advertising, with advice about various media. Both Tedford and NCGA’s Kelly Smith emphasized the need for regular customer surveys.

### Brand management

*Marketing Matters* reflects the diversity of tasks required to fulfill promotions, merchandising, marketing, advertising, outreach, owner services, public relations, social media and education. While large co-ops may have numerous people in these roles, smaller stores often have only one or two people representing key areas of responsibility. A brand management approach helps communicate the importance of a marketing strategy



PHOTO BY SERINA SULENTENIC

Small groups at *Marketing Matters* conferred about best practices and strategies for collaboration.

owned by everyone throughout the co-op. Messages must be decided upon, designed, and then directed both internally and externally.

To compare approaches, conference attendees shared printed examples of communication pieces: newsletters, posters, ownership materials, coupons, shelf tags, and swag. They requested a chance to pool data regarding web design, a top-of-mind topic for many.

Field trips to area co-ops (Life Grocery and Sevananda Natural Foods Market) and competitors such as Harry’s Farmers Market (owned by Whole Foods) offered time to gather ideas for displays, signage, and sampling. Meals provided a further opportunity to network around specific topics.

### Keynotes and conversations

As food co-ops adjust to an increasingly sophisticated retail landscape, new modes of communication compete for attention. Two keynote addresses considered these challenges in different ways: Joey Sargent of Brand Sprout Advisors reviewed the rapidly expanding world of social media.

Kaihan Krippendorff, *Wired* contributor and author of *Out Think the Competition*, engaged the audience in generating ideas at high speed. Arguing that a “fourth option” opens space to outpace and outlive competitors, Krippendorff unpacked stratagems such as “Coordinate the Uncoordinated” and “Create Something Out of Nothing” with reference to inventive business ideas.

Member presentations provided insight into very specific co-op projects. In a session on “Proven Strategies for Growth” Adrienne Battis shared rebranded materials from Community Food Co-op in Bellingham, Wa. Mari Niescior, from Outpost Natural Foods (Milwaukee, Wis.), talked about “Points, Patronage, and Owner Perks.”

John Bryant of Roanoke Natural Foods (Va.) shared the circuitous