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Do Customers Care About State Promotional Campaigns?

Hayk Khachatryan & Alicia Rihn

Recently, state promotional programs have become the face of local production. They've been used extensively to encourage consumption of products produced in-state. Although many of the programs emphasize local fresh produce, some of them include ornamental plants in their product lists.

In March 2014, Florida's "Fresh from Florida" campaign extended to include greenhouse and nursery crops. A recent research project conducted by researchers across the U.S. and led by the University of Florida's Dr. Hayk Khachatryan set out to determine how Florida plant consumers respond to the "Fresh from Florida" logo on ornamental plants, their awareness of the campaign and the potential influence of the campaign on plant sales. To accomplish this goal, Florida plant consumers were asked to rate their purchase likelihood for fruit-producing plants with various origin promotions (i.e. Fresh from Florida, Grown in the U.S. [domestic], and Grown outside the U.S. [imported]).

While rating their purchase likelihood, the consumers' eye movements were recorded to assess the relationship between visual attention to in-store promotions and purchase behavior. Knowing the relationship between visual attention to in-store promotions and purchasing behavior could have substantial implications in terms of marketing tactics, promotional strategies and plant sales. The study revealed important insights on these topics, including the following:

- 74% of consumers perceive "Fresh from Florida" products as "local."
- The presence of the "Fresh from Florida" logo improved purchase likelihood by 52% when compared to imported plants. Plants grown domestically improved purchase likelihood by 35% when compared to imported plants.
- Consumers who were aware of the "Fresh from Florida" campaign on ornamental plants (approximately 52% of the sample), were 29% to 35% more likely to purchase the plants than consumers who weren't aware of the campaign on ornamental plants.
- Visual attention to the "Fresh from Florida" logo improved purchase likelihood by 59%.

- Consumers who were aware of the “Fresh from Florida” campaign AND visually attended to the logo were 165% more likely to purchase the plants.

Although the study was limited to Florida consumers, the results show a positive relationship between the “Fresh from Florida” campaign and consumers’ purchase likelihood for ornamental plants, which has important implications that can be extended out to other state promotional programs.

First, the ornamental plant industry can leverage consumers’ association of state promotional programs with local products to generate consumer interest. For instance, local products are often perceived as being fresher, higher quality, more environmentally friendly, better adapted to the environment and beneficial to the local economy than products from greater distances. All of these benefits are potential ways to improve a firm’s value proposition.

Next, consider joining a state promotional program to attract consumers. Compared to other promotional efforts, state promotional programs are relatively inexpensive, come with a variety of tools to promote the origin of the plants and often are very recognizable to consumers due to their use on fresh produce.

If your firm is already a member of a state promotional program, take actions to improve consumer awareness since increased consumer awareness improves their purchase likelihood (as shown by this study). For instance, in-store branding promotions (i.e. logos, signs, plant tags, etc.) and educational efforts can be used to emphasize origin, differentiate products and improve visibility to end consumers.

As indicated by this study, consumers are interested in ornamental plants that are produced in-state and promoted using state promotional programs. With the local movement in full swing, now is the time to embrace your state’s promotional program and utilize it to improve the value of your products to your customers. **GP**

Dr. Hayk Khachatryan was the principal investigator on the study and Alicia Rihn is a postdoctoral research associate. Both are at the Consumer Behavior and Insights Lab at the Mid-Florida Research and Education Center, University of Florida.