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*-Ed Reidy, President Happy Apples*

# MOVING YOUR BRAND UP THE FOOD CHAIN

Marketing Strategies to Grow  
Local & Regional Food Brands

**PATRICK NYCZ**

FOUNDER OF NEWPOINT

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# **Moving Your Brand Up the Food Chain™**

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& Regional Food Brands**

**By Patrick Nycz**

“Natural, organic, local, sustainable, craft, artisan – the market for food is exciting and dynamic – and the market is open to food entrepreneurs with exciting new products/concepts. But, building a local or regional food brand and carving out space in the food store and food service market is a daunting task for anyone, let alone an entrepreneur/small company.

In *Moving your Brand up the Food Chain*, Patrick Nycz has pulled back the curtain on building an exciting and profitable food brand. Loaded with original research and case examples, Nycz takes the food entrepreneur/regional food company through every step of the brand building process in a pragmatic, focused way. (Not to be missed is Chapter 3, *The Buyer Perspective*, where results of extensive interviews with food buyers/retailers provide deep insights into what it takes for a new food product/company to be successful with their organizations). If you are ready to take your food product from the farmer’s market or CSA to the food store, or ready to take your local brand to regional/national distribution, this book is for you.”

*Jay Akridge, Glenn W. Sample Dean of Agriculture, Purdue University*

“I’ve seen the principles in this book in action! There is no question the marketing strategies Patrick and NewPoint has guided us through work and have been a big part of growing our Indiana Kitchen brand over the past decade.”

*Russell L Yearwood, President, Indiana Packers Corp.*

“Through this book, Patrick presents a systematic process that really helps you focus on what’s important for the success of your products and brand allowing you to avoid costly and brand-killing trial and error. Everyone knows it’s important to stand out but you must get on the retail shelf first. This book will guide there and maximize the value of your brand.”

*Edward Reidy, President Happy Apples*

Even after working and being so familiar with Patrick and his marketing team for more than 30 years, it’s still fascinating to see their principles outlined so clearly in this book. It’s like the reverse of applied learning, and it only validates how they have a unique ability to know your business so well, and still surprise you with new ideas. Without question, for anyone in the food-industry who is thinking in terms of a brand launch—rather than a product launch—these pages offer a great recipe.”

*Michelle Wibel, CFSP, President, Nemco Food Equipment*

A really great systematic approach to branding with a focus on food & beverage companies. The retail buyer quotes and perspectives add a very practical approach to the creating, producing, marketing and selling a product. Nice job!

**Cary Gutwein**, *President, Copper Moon Coffee*

“

In the local food-flooded market, voicing your own story is key to standing out in the sea of competing brands. But where do you begin? The first, and often hardest, step is articulating *why* you do what you do. No one can tell that story better than you, and this book will help. Nycz and his team at NewPoint are veterans at helping companies attain their foundational brand messaging. *Moving Your Brand Up the Food Chain* is an invaluable compass for orienting your brand and getting it on track.”

**Heather Tallman**, *Indiana Grown Membership Development Program Manager,  
Indiana State Department of Agriculture*

It is as if a string of perfect miracles needs to happen for a successful new food product launch. Patrick's book is laid out in clear detail like a road map to achieve these goals.

**Vince Ligas**, *41 Years Retail Meat Industry*

As a former marketer at General Foods, as well as President of a Consumer Retail Package Company, I can tell you Patrick's book captures the essence of what regional food companies need to know to be successful marketing, selling and distributing their food products to retailers. This book could be re-titled, “Quick Review of Marketing Essentials for Successful Selling.” Use this book as your constant reference during the entire life cycle of your food product line, and this will insure long term success.

**Barrie Simpson**, *Food & Consumer Products President, Retired*

Are you a small regional brand going up against the big guys? Want to expand your distribution and increase your margins? Read this book and learn how with Patrick and his NewPoint team helped double our retail sales 3 years in a row!

**Randy Toleman**, *Food Industry Consultant, Past V.P. Sales & Marketing, Mariah Packing Co & Indiana Packers Corp.*



**Moving Your Brand  
Up the Food Chain™**

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## FOREWORD

You're charged with profitably growing a developing food brand and you're not quite sure what to do next...

Relax! The next step is in your hands: Read this book.

Patrick Nycz has crafted this straightforward and easy to understand, practical guide to food brand marketing for food company owners, entrepreneurs, business managers, sales managers and yes, even food brand marketers. Patrick shares his knowledge and approach, honed from nearly 30 years of building consumer packaged brands and helping companies navigate the critical steps of consumer brand building.

In *Moving Your Brand Up the Food Chain*, you will discover why Patrick Nycz believes that the consumer and retail markets are ripe for developing and growing regional and local food brands. This book demonstrates how to capitalize on this trend with a strategic, consumer-based marketing foundation and approach. This book covers the waterfront of consumer brand marketing; it is both a road map and a quick reference guide discussing the critical topics along the path to developing a successful food brand.

Several times in my career, agencies have presented creative solutions and marketing tactics without doing the fundamental strategic work up front. As a result, they didn't truly understand who their client's target consumer actually was. Effective brand marketing just isn't developed that way. To build and grow profitable, vibrant and resilient food brands, it is imperative to choose a marketing partner who takes the right path. Patrick Nycz gets it and has practiced it throughout his professional marketing career.

If your current or a prospecting advertising agency is not proposing and following a brand development roadmap like the one Patrick Nycz lays out in his book, it's probably time for a change. They could actually be squandering your company's valuable financial resources by amplifying the wrong message or targeting the wrong consumers.

If your success and career depend on profitably growing and developing a food brand, *Moving Your Brand Up the Food Chain* by Patrick Nycz is a must-read.

***Greg Metzger, August 2017***

Greg Metzger is an accomplished brand marketing strategist and practitioner. Over a stellar career spanning more than 30 years, he has grown and expanded profitable regional brands in many highly competitive food categories including frozen food, spreads, salad dressing, beverage, snack foods, tomato products, condiments, sauces and salsa. He has held senior executive level marketing positions in several regionally and nationally recognized branded food companies. Greg is the former head of marketing for Indiana's own Red Gold Tomato Products Company. Based on his expertise, Greg has been quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*.

## PREFACE

One of my fondest childhood memories is of my grandfather's A&P grocery store in Tiffin, Ohio. If we were lucky enough, my sister and I would get to spend Saturday night at my grandparents' house, attend church the next morning, and then—the highlight of the day—we would stop by the store my grandfather managed. In the late 1960s, the store was always closed on Sundays. A closed supermarket is a magical place to a five- or six-year-old kid. We had the run of the business. Zipping up and down center-of-store aisles that were stacked tall with products, checking out our breath in the frozen food freezers and, of course, getting shooed away from the candy aisle and playing on the checkout lanes. I fell in love with the place.

Today, the grocery store aisle still has a hold on me. I can't just run in for a jar of spaghetti sauce or lettuce greens without pausing to check out a new product or packaging upgrade. If I am shopping for the week with my wife, she will hear me say, "I'll catch up" more than once while I jot down a few notes on my phone or sneak a few pics of a new product. No other consumer retail outlet can match the supermarket as a highly competitive intersection of constantly evolving trends, innovation, and new product launches. This book aims to help small, local, and emerging regional food brands grow market share within this consumer-driven space.

Maybe that's why I have spent my entire career working in the business of consumer-packaged goods (CPG) branding ranging from hardware, kitchen gadgets, office supplies to crafts, toys, games, and, of course, food. Whether working with established brands such as Ace Hardware, Master Lock, Rubbermaid, Wilson Sporting Goods, or

Hasbro, or with emerging brands in the food sector, one constant has remained clear:

The consumer may be king, but the retail and food service buyer is the gatekeeper. Therefore, it is in a supplier's best interest to know what a buyer cares about and is looking for in a supplier.

What exactly is a buyer looking for in a supplier? If you asked ten manufacturing food salespeople this question, you would probably get ten different answers. But if you asked 10 different food buyers the same question, you would likely only receive a few different answers. This book walks you through those buyers' answers as well as our third-party point of view on best practices for growing your brand.

In my experience acting as marketing and brand support for sales teams that sell into every type of retailer—small chains, mid-major regional stores, national big-box outlets—one constant stands out: buyers are looking for information in the form of category leadership, and category leadership only comes with doing your homework.

About homework, there comes a time when you'll realize that you must roll up your sleeves and do the real work to experience real success. This holds true even if it means stepping outside your comfort zone—and potentially on someone else's toes—to make an impact.

Homework started sooner than expected for me. Early in my career, the product team at Ace Hardware came back from a sourcing trip with 10 different bathroom hardware fixture sets: towel bars, toilet paper holders, and such all available in brass, stainless steel, and brushed nickel. Their job was to “pitch” the line to the stores. My firm was asked to create a branded program, name each line under the program, and develop the sell copy and packaging.

What does a young marketer with limited experience in bath hardware do in this situation? He dives in the trenches. In the days before the internet, it meant heading out to the hardware and department stores

where these items were sold to learn as much as I could about the category. I learned about price points, product names, packaging trends, how the product was merchandised on the retail shelf, and hitting the right perceived value with the packaging and branding.

With this type of homework ingrained in my work-DNA, I took a Warren Industries position with its RoseArt-branded puzzle, craft, and game subsidiary. I started as a creative director and oversaw the departments of research and development and creative services. I then became the director of marketing in the last half of my time with the organization. During my tenure at Warren, RoseArt became the No. 1 brand in the country, with category management roles at Walmart and Meijer. However, we only got there by doing the work.

The leadership at Warren believed strongly in research across all areas of our category. That meant research into consumer attitudes and shopping habits, strategic planning that focused on our team's core competencies, and a pulse check of the category and competition through deep and thorough store checks. Although this information drove our product development and marketing, it was crucial that we packaged the information properly during our sales presentation meetings with buyers and positioned our team as experts in the category.

When Mega Brands bought Warren, and it became apparent that our division was not a priority for the new leadership, I decided to utilize my knowledge and invest personally. I bought into an established marketing agency named Indiana Design Consortium (IDC Marketing for short) that placed a high value on collaborative data- and research-based return-on-investment (ROI) business growth strategies.

Since 1972, IDC Marketing was first engaged by its clients to identify unmet or underserved needs for foodservice supplies and equipment and then design product solutions that meet those needs. The resulting products included many innovations in food safety

and food service employee safety, such as the blue Wear-Ever® Cool Handle (licensed for manufacture by Lincoln Foodservice Products, Inc.).

IDC Marketing has worked in multiple categories and industries throughout the years. However, it has always maintained a roster of food manufacturers/processors and food service equipment manufacturers as its solid client base. Our marketing firm's motto is "Strategy First," which means the company philosophy leans heavily on becoming an expert in our client's category and then aligning their brand for success.

## **New Focus, New Direction: NewPoint**

More than 45 years of proven success with our food industry client partners, coupled with data showing significant growth in the food production and distribution sector, particularly for local, regional brands, has inspired my team to form a new company called NewPoint. The competitive and always evolving food industry is its sole focus.

NewPoint is a collection of seasoned strategists and creatives who have one goal: to Move Your Brand Up the Food Chain™. NewPoint is a full-service strategic marketing and branding firm with an in-depth focus and concentration on the food industry sector. The core values of IDC Marketing remain: NewPoint is in the business of growing your business.

# **Section 1**

## **Why Now for Local and Regional Food Brands**



# Chapter 1

## IS THIS BOOK FOR YOU?

Is this book for you? It could be if you answer yes to the following questions:

- Do you sell a food product to retailers and/or food service outlets?
- Do you ever wonder why the buyer, or gatekeeper, passes on your product and opts for the product offered by your competitors instead?
- Are you interested in hearing what grocery merchandising and food service procurement professionals are looking for and possibly missing from their food supplier partners?

This book could also be for you if you answer no to these questions:

- Are you at your top capacity in terms of food shipments?
- Does your brand/label own or share the top market share in your local market's grocery aisle?
- Do you know why your top customers, including your end-line consumers, prefer your product over the product offered by your competitors?
- Are you procuring top pricing?
- Do you understand how to leverage macro and consumer food trends into sales for your product?

I tackle these questions within the chapters of this book. And although I have been on the front lines as a director of marketing for many consumer products, this book is not merely filled with personal anecdotes about the tricks and tips used to support a product's sale. Such information will not help you because your products, region, customers, and internal sales, operations, and distribution models are all different from those I've worked within the past.

I took the same approach to this book that NewPoint takes to the work we do with our client partners—I did the homework. I talked to grocery merchandising and foodservice procurement professionals. I asked them the following questions:

- What is the buyer looking for in a branded food partner?
- What are pros and cons to being a local or regional food brand supplier?
- What are two or three questions you wish food manufacturers (current or new) would ask?

Although I asked these questions while composing this book, I also intend to keep asking questions regularly—probably every six months or so—because the food industry is not a static environment. It is fluid.

At NewPoint, we've found that whenever we ask grocery merchandising and foodservice procurement professionals these questions, their answers change. Sometimes their solutions are based on the buyer's corporate goals for the current cycle. Their responses are influenced by a myriad of other things such as the general competitive supermarket landscape, consumer trends, company initiatives on evolving government regulations for labeling and food safety, local sourcing, transparency, and so on.

Ultimately, this book is for you if you want to move your brand up the food chain. It's for when you ask the biggest question of all: is now the time to accelerate growth? Only you and your team will know.

The indicators are there. Product sales are growing steadily. Customers are asking for more from your company. Your business has started to bump up against the big chains more often. It's not unusual for a smaller, local or regional player to be viewed as a commodity or a "value" brand. Are you happy with that designation?

Most of the companies NewPoint works with have higher aspirations. They want to mean something more to their customers. They are focused on customer service. They strive to partner with the gatekeepers in the food industry and provide good products at a fair price.

However, these companies often encounter a capacity issue and not the type involving the company's operations. These companies do not have a processing, manufacturing, or a sales issue. They do not have the capacity to create a sustainable and engaging marketing strategy. Most of these executive teams running regional food companies have excellent leadership, great operations teams, and awesome sales teams. They truly believe that they have better and/or different products and that they just need help in marketing, which can make the difference between being a selling business that grows and one that remains a small commodity product line. Unfortunately, these executives simply don't know what to say when the gatekeepers—the grocery merchandising and foodservice procurement professionals—ask them why it should be their product, and not the competitor's product, on the shelf.

In the highly competitive world of the food industry, brand equals margin, and marketing makes the brand.

You should continue reading if you want to learn how to make informed decisions in areas such as positioning your company against

competitors, product packaging, and leveraging macro and consumer food trends. These are all aspects of marketing strategies that will help transform your product line into a brand and create a demonstrable difference in how the buyer views your line. When this happens, it can signal that your company's product line is emerging as a real brand, which, in turn, can signify the upward price flexibility and margins associated with being a name-brand product.

Within this book, I address numerous topics aimed at helping local, smaller, and regional food brands propel themselves up the food chain. The topics have been divided into general sections, including an industry overview, brand reconnaissance, brand advantage strategies, brand growth programs, and brand prosperity and long-term planning. We will proceed as follows:

**Chapter 2: Size and Location Matter.** In the past five years, smaller brands and private brand manufacturers grew more rapidly than the 25 biggest U.S. food and beverage manufacturers. This translates to the top 25 food brand manufacturers losing a 3.5 percent market share to their smaller competitors. The opportunity for growth is there.

**Chapter 3: The Buyer's Perspective.** Here I analyze the interviews NewPoint conducted with retail buyers, distributors, and brokers. I also discuss what differentiates manufacturers and how a company leverages that differentiation.

**Chapter 4: Marketing Is Everything.** How can a small brand compete with the big-budget well-known brands? By taking a page from their marketing book and developing a strong brand through an effective strategic marketing plan. Marketing isn't the only way to elevate a brand, but it can mean everything.

**Chapter 5: Internal Plans and Goals.** Big picture—where do you want to be? Is your goal a larger market share or increased profits? You must know what goals are to create your internal plan. Then you can

decide what the internal challenges you'll need to face to reach your goal.

**Chapter 6: External Market Factors.** What are your external market factors? Learn how to establish product differentiation through industry, category, competitive and trend analysis.

**Chapter 7: Foundational Brand Development.** Ascertain your true and clear brand strength, brand position, brand promise, and brand message. Using these discoveries, you can develop a brand that resonates with your core target audience and differentiates you from the competition.

**Chapter 8: Branded Visual Identity.** Consistency in your brand's visual identity is vital to developing and nurturing a loyal consumer base. Develop your logo, packaging, sales support materials, and other aspects of a visual brand identity by establishing consistent styles, fonts, colors, and visual imagery for your product.

**Chapter 9: Packaging.** Learn how to stand out and make a lasting impression in just a few seconds, while also understanding the importance of product labeling and food safety.

**Chapter 10: Branded Campaigns.** Creating marketing messages emphasizes your brand's essence and appeal to its core audience. Here, I'll discuss the importance of both digital and traditional marketing channels, and familiarize you with the Brand Affinity Matrix.

**Chapter 11: Brand Management.** In this chapter, you'll discover the role that brand managers play, including their responsibilities, keys to their success, and common brand management mistakes. Effective brand management can turn a manufacturer that simply makes something into one that *is* something.

**Chapter 12: Brand Activation.** To aid in your brand's growth, you need to build a complete brand marketing plan and support sales. Here, I'll cover developing a plan that addresses activation strategies,

awareness tactics, engagement, couponing, buyer presentations, and other tactics to package your brand's campaign.

**Chapter 13: Regional Brand Powerhouse.** Learn to dominate your chosen region by defining your target area and concentrating on it through focused marketing and grassroots tactics. Then you create your plan for sales, marketing, and operations growth.

**Chapter 14: Get Digital and Grow the Brand.** To further add growth through advertising, embrace digital marketing by developing social media and other online engagement strategies. You can create a circle of consumer feedback and response, cultivate brand evangelists, and improve your customer service all through social media.

**Chapter 15: Public Relations and Crisis Management.** This chapter discusses a content strategy for customer and consumer communications, ranging from promotions and new products on the shelves to consumer complaints and recalls.

**Chapter 16: Strategic Product Development.** Growth happens through innovation. In this chapter, I'll teach you to develop new products by identifying your ideal customer, tracking and leveraging trends, discussing your buyer's needs and preferences, and engaging in effective and efficient development.

## Chapter 2

### SIZE AND LOCATION MATTER

*“It’s harder to compete with the big guys when you are a smaller supplier. It’s harder to expand into other markets, where consumers may not be familiar with your name versus a national brand. But a lot of the national (retailers) today want what’s regional. So it can be done. Absolutely.”*

—M. M., senior buyer, 22 years’ experience

It began with your vision—a food enthusiast’s dream of launching a product line. Combined with your entrepreneurial spirit and a lot of hard work, you have transformed that vision into reality. Your original vision is now a branded product line that landed on store shelves and is rubbing elbows with the food industry’s heavy hitters.

However, that once-satisfying elbow-rubbing has developed into more of a jostling for space as the vision for your brand collides with the seemingly unstoppable forces of national food producers. Getting to where you are now was hard enough. Why should you think that battling with the heavy hitters is even possible?

Here’s why: There has never been a better time to do so. Currently, an almost overwhelming number of market indicators suggest that there’s an unprecedented amount of volatility in the industry. This shift is consumer-driven, and it has caused everything to evolve:

- A 2015 U.S. Census Bureau report stated that millennials, the demographic of young people born in between 1985 and 2000 with the highest familiarity of emerging technologies in digital, mobile and social media, already outnumbered baby boomers by nearly 10 million, so consumer demographics are definitely changing.

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## MOVING YOUR BRAND UP THE FOOD CHAIN

The food industry is on the verge of a revolution, with smaller, local and regional food brands finding big potential for growth. The increasing influence of millennials on consumer tastes, the desire for products produced locally, and mistrust of big food companies open opportunities to small and medium-sized food companies.

An experienced consumer packaged goods marketer and his team have created a book to help navigate the looming volatility in the food industry. For instance, the U.S. Department of Agriculture predicts that the sales of locally produced foods, which reached \$12 billion in 2014, will soar to \$20 billion by 2019. A 2015 study by the Food Marketing Institute and the Grocery Manufacturers Association found that smaller and private food brand manufacturers grew 4 percent vs. the 25 biggest U.S. food and beverage manufacturers, who grew 1 percent between 2009 and 2013.

*Moving Your Brand Up the Food Chain* offers practical tips to help local, small and emerging food brands compete against the big brands to grow their market share. Interviews and survey answers from industry professionals provide invaluable information. The book covers the retail buyer's perspective, marketing, external market factors, brand development, packaging, brand management, strategic product development, and more. Such details are critical if local, smaller or regional food brands hope to grow their businesses and move up the food chain.

### AUTHOR BIO

Patrick Nycz, a business owner and author, is a well-known expert on consumer packaged goods—launching and managing successful brands in everything from toys and games to office supplies, hardware and food. He owns NewPoint, a full-service marketing agency that focuses on marketing strategies for emerging food brands. Patrick and his team, who have more than 45 years of experience helping bring success to food production and distribution companies, collaborate on data and research to create creative business-growth strategies. The author and his wife, Cindy, have two sons.



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