

Tips & Tactics from 11 Brands on Targeting & Connecting with Customers

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Bottle & Bottega: From agony to success-tasy

In Bottle & Bottega's first year, says Nancy Bigley, co-founder of the paint and sip studio, "We tried every approach we could think of to see where we landed. We are an adult business with alcohol - and you don't want screaming kids in the next room. From a marketing perspective, it was a nightmare. We agonized. Our flagship store had big windows, but I looked at 'Kids Party' and 'BYOB' and it was a problem."



That year of testing convinced Bigley that the right target market for the fledgling brand fell on the adult side. She also knew that although women were the majority of Bottle & Bottega's likely

customers, her marketing would have to be gender-neutral. "Men love painting," she says. "They just don't know it."

Seven years after Bottle & Bottega's first franchise debuted with the understanding that women would be the brand's primary target audience, customers at more than 20 locations in eight states now power another form of marketing. "Existing guests are our number-one referral source," says Bigley.

Today her choice is not so much who, but how. Social media, with daily fresh content, much of it produced by franchisees, is a large part of the brand's marketing. But, says Bigley, "Marketing is not just one thing, it's a combination of things working together. The challenge is that there are so many formats and they change, but the category of business must remain the focus. What are we going after?"

Bigley spent a year analyzing Bottle & Bottega's market, but other franchises know from the start who their customers will be. Still others evolve over time as their brand matures and consumer preferences change. Each provides lessons, so we asked 10 more companies how they define and target their customers.

Cinnaholic: not just for vegans

Cinnaholic was founded by two vegans to share a cinnamon roll that was vegan-friendly (no dairy/lactose, eggs, or cholesterol). These goodies, definitely not standard fare, would be playing to an audience whose food preferences represent a tiny portion of U.S. consumers: just 3.2 percent of U.S. adults are vegetarians, and a smaller slice of them are vegans.



"We would tell people we were going to start all-vegan and they would look at us with, 'Are you crazy?'" says co-founder Florian Radke. However, he and his wife, Shannon Michelle Radke ("the baking behind the brand"), who met in an online vegan and vegetarian group, understood the passion of their singular audience. Rather than buying a billboard that might reach a general audience, the Radkes promoted Cinnaholic to their peer group.

"When we started," he says, "we were purely word of mouth." The couple opened their first bakery in the San Francisco Bay area, where a vegetarian advocacy and support group had already been at work for a decade to build a community that knew where they could find what they needed. Just eight years after that first store opened, Cinnaholic has 21 franchise locations in 11 states and another five in Canada.

Today the Radkes use Facebook to find and target their vegetarian and vegan clientele. Radke says he sees their success as proof that ad agencies that advise clients that certain large sums

must be spent are wrong. "My answer is no," he says. Instead, it should be "small budgets and super-focused markets, but you need to have an interesting product that's worth talking about."

Radke sees Cinnaholic as the originator of a new category of niche market - plant-based vegan bakeries - and is happy to see new competitors appear, because they grow the market and spread awareness of the benefits of vegan diets. "Once you have a strong niche, people will talk about it and people will follow it," he says. "You become buzzworthy, something that feels like a healthy experience."

Cinnaholic recently opened in Edmonton, Ontario, the brand's first Canadian location. Customers, he says, waited in line for two hours to order cinnamon rolls with choices of more than 20 frostings and toppings that change with the seasons. A local newspaper story mentioned "vegan" in the first sentence, but the last sentence in that lead paragraph also noted that the cinnamon buns were suitable for people with allergies.

Camp Transformation: filling a void

Alejandra and Luis Font had a very clear vision for their comprehensive fitness franchise, Camp Transformation. In a world filled with gyms where many patrons don't look like they need any extra exercise, "We wanted to focus on people who weren't used to working out," says Alejandra Font. "We soon realized there was a void in the weight loss area of fitness. We came to understand that many people have the desire, but no idea of how to go about it."

Camp Transformation has become the place where clients can find a step-by-step plan for help with nutrition, weigh-ins, and a community of others for support. The brand now has more than 100 locations in the U.S. and Mexico, and its Facebook group has 50,000 members - people who have been through the program and who now coach newbies, says Font.

At the beginning, Font would hand out flyers advertising free sessions. A few years ago the couple added Facebook ads. "That really helped us grow to a different level because we had a much wider reach," she says. Recently, they added Instagram ads to their marketing mix, but Facebook remains the quickest way to reach a key demographic, she says. "Typically, it's a woman who has had kids, who has forgotten about herself because she's been busy taking care of the family."

Pokéworks: Hawaiian fast food

Founded in 2015, Pokéworks has grown rapidly to 20 U.S. locations, with another 40 planned to open next year. The company's goal is to have 120 locations operating by 2020. Its general target audience is Millennials, appealing to them with a focus on sustainability in the brand's ingredients, in its building materials, and in its ability to customize a meal for



vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, and nut-free eaters. However, Pokéworks is following a more sophisticated marketing approach for each new local market it enters.

"We try to be knowledge-based, to gather insights and information," says Kevin Hsu, a co-founder and the brand's chief marketing officer. That approach told him that for the franchise's first New York City location, travel time would be an important factor. As a former resident, Hsu understood that keeping that time down in the fast-paced city would be a huge plus. The first Pokéworks was located a short walk from both Grand Central Station and Penn Station, Manhattan's major rail and subway hubs.

Hsu also promotes the brand through Facebook and Yelp - and those social media giants connect Pokéworks to the larger community of food world communicators and influencers. "We were able to attract key coverage at that New York City location from Insider Food, and it went viral," he says.

Despite opening two more locations nearby, Hsu says, each new Pokéworks has been able to hold onto its neighborhoods, and the brand is branching out to locations in Long Island and Brooklyn. Throughout, he's keeping a sharp eye on his social media base because he prizes the plentiful feedback, quick turnaround, and comparative analysis of which platform is drawing in which customers.



Golden Corral & Russo's: families

Golden Corral (45 years in business with more than 500 locations) and Russo's New York Pizzeria and Russo's Coal-Fired Italian Kitchen (48 locations with 35 more in development) have solidified their relationship with their core audience - families. "We've been doing targeted marketing for years," says Anthony Russo, founder and CEO of a franchise concept that began at his parents' restaurant in 1978.

"We tested the waters - display ads, magazines, newspapers, postcards - and what works best is to reach out to customers within a three-mile radius of a location," he says. And what he's found really works well in bringing in the customers is offers of family specials: two large pizzas or a tray of lasagna with salad and bread that serves an entire family.

Understanding that families are multi-generational is part of what has contributed to the expansion of Golden Corral's endless buffet to more than 150 items, says Shelley Wolford, the brand's senior vice president of communications and strategy. "We have something for everyone."

The brand also has strong appeal with Hispanic consumers, she says, so development has been focused throughout the Southwest, Texas, and California. In addition, in its national media

spend, says Wolford, "We purchase television networks and programs that are preferred by this consumer group. We also buy Spanish-language television. All of our commercials are created in English and Spanish, as are our merchandising materials."



Young Rembrandts: parents

Young Rembrandts, founded in 1988 and franchising since 2001, has always had a very specific target market. "We know our audience backward and forward," says Liz Wahl, director of franchise marketing.

"From the nature of our business, our audience is parents with kids ages 3 to 12. We know our parents, and they don't change."

To reach those parents, Young Rembrandts uses a variety of methods, which have evolved over time into a mixture of traditional tools including print, and digital campaigns that embrace everything from Facebook to email marketing. However, says Wahl, "We see more of a return in grassroots marketing - connecting one on one with moms and dads. So we try to be visible where they are looking, and that includes at their child's school."

Some franchisees partner with schools to host events. Young Rembrandts conducts national marketing campaigns and buys national advertising, but that's more for brand building. The power of these combined national and local efforts has meant long-lasting relationships with parents, Wahl says, so much so that most new franchise buyers are parents of students who have taken a class at Young Rembrandts.

Pilates ProWorks: word of mouth

When Pilates ProWorks began franchising in 2009, co-founder Oscar Sanin felt strongly that his likeliest clients would be people who already knew something about Pilates. He was proven correct. That was the first wave, he says, and word of mouth quickly filled the brand's 17 locations in the U.S. and China.



To boost familiarity with the brand and its fitness offerings, Sanin has rolled out special offers, such as one free class and special events that welcome families to come in and learn what the brand can provide - mothers and daughters, for instance. "We try to keep our community happy," says Sanin. Social media helps him spread the word, too.

ShelfGenie: multiple personas

To help appeal to its target market, ShelfGenie changed up its marketing approach with some internal restructuring. "Before, the digital and print teams worked in silos, and there was not a

lot of communication between the teams. This was the first barrier we had to break down," says Doug Evans, director of marketing. "To implement a true multichannel marketing strategy aimed at personas, we had to work as one cohesive group."

ShelfGenie has 34 franchisees operating 121 territories, providing pull-out shelves for existing cabinets that are custom-made and professionally installed. "Anyone with cabinets can benefit from our product, so it really spans multigenerational and multicultural audiences," Evans says. "We had to determine why people need or want our product, and then get down to the demographic and behavioral aspects of the personas."



It was a struggle at first. "We all had slightly different ideas about certain aspects of the personas," he says. Using data from its website, ad platforms, and talking with ShelfGenie designers, the team was able to hone in on a small group of personas varying in age, location, interests, occupation, and buying habits. A 30-year-old man is going to seek different websites, watch different content, and use ShelfGenie differently than a 65-year-old woman, so each must be targeted differently, he says. With that in mind, the brand uses different copy, headlines, images, videos, and placements to speak to each persona.

Using digital technology allows ShelfGenie to gather and use real-time data to make effective, strategic decisions more quickly, says Evans. "We're able to easily segment our audience and optimize campaigns based on data and test results." A recent video production intended to show how ShelfGenie's solutions can be used across multiple generations and differing physical abilities, featured a child and her mother, as well as a pregnant soon-to-be mother, using the products differently and easily.

The results have been good. Traffic to ShelfGenie's website has increased by almost 90 percent over past year, he says. "We have also brought appointments up by 16 percent over the same period. Facebook is a huge part of our digital strategy, and through ads and community engagement, we were able to more than double the number of followers."

Change is also part of ShelfGenie's marketing style. "We believe in failing fast and using what we learn to make small changes more frequently," says Evans. "That says we make optimizations only if we are confident in our data and sample size." One example is on Pinterest, adding a call to action to book a free design consultation.

"We were getting a lot of traffic to our landing pages, but they weren't booking their free consultation," he says. "We pivoted our strategy and changed the call to action to get a free solutions magazine. Once they received it, they were entered into an automated email nurture journey, where we build a relationship and provide them with valuable content." The lessons gained from this, says Evans, have helped the brand improve its marketing results. "One small change in a button color on a landing page could double conversions."

Pearle Vision: chief health officer

Pearle Vision, too, has designed its marketing around an imagined customer - someone it calls the chief health officer, aged 45 to 55, who makes a family's healthcare decisions. Building trust with that person, says Alex Wilkes, senior vice president and general manager, shapes the brand's marketing around heightened quality of care and ease of access. Pearle Vision has more than 550 locations nationwide, with plans to open another 30 this year.

"Almost a quarter of our appointments are booked online, and we recently made it even easier to do that by helping find locations where you can book appointments for a family as a block," Wilkes says. Stores also are open nights and weekends, and the company plays up its association with frame manufacturer and distributor Luxottica.



Media buys are directed at audiences who fit the chief healthcare officer profile. "We have a comprehensive database and do personalized offers," he says. "We are very scientific and have a robust customer relationship management program for retargeting."

Pearle Vision is also active on social media. "We run campaigns on Facebook and monitor social media quite closely," says Wilkes. A 2017 ad produced by advertising agency BBDO earned 140 million views. Titled "Ben's Glasses," the ad tells the story of a boy who reconnects with his late grandfather through a pair of his old eyeglasses, fitted with new lenses by an understanding Pearle Vision professional.



Yang's Braised Chicken Rice: one thing

With 6,000 restaurants in China, Japan, Singapore, and Australia (and one in Tustin, California that opened last September), Yang's Braised Chicken Rice does not need to explain itself. In the United States, however, the premise of the franchise is extraordinary: it serves only one dish.

The recipe for braised chicken with rice dates back to founder Xiao Lu Yang's grandmother, and has always been the signature dish of the family's restaurants. Yet simplicity can be a strength. Xinyu Zhang, CEO of the brand's USA Group, knows that for many Americans, being "bombarded by all these choices at a Chinese restaurant can make you feel overwhelmed."

At a Yang's, he says, "You know exactly what you want when you walk in the door. We simplify their choices." Given the recognition of both the brand and the dish across Asia, marketing for the first U.S. location is aimed at non-Asian media outlets and focuses on the quality of the dish.

"When it comes to food, there shouldn't be any boundaries, and we want to have more people be able to try this dish," says Zhang. And while the one-choice concept will remain unchanged in

the U.S., he says, "We are considering maybe adding a dessert."



The Joint Chiropractic: two things

The Joint Chiropractic franchise has more than 400 locations around the country. Peter Holt, president and CEO since 2016, understands the value of two key elements when marketing The Joint's services.

First, most of The Joint's locations are in small-box retail spaces, anchored by a supermarket. That means customers will more than likely live or work within a travel radius of 5 to 15 minutes from each location.

Second, Holt knows that almost half of first-time patients are there because they've been attracted by digital marketing activity. That means employing SEO to push The Joint onto the first page of search engine results - especially if the search includes the keyword "pain." That single word is another targeted marketing focus pushing visits to The Joint's franchisees, says Holt.

"The Joint has one of the broadest demographic patient bases because pain is universal," he says. And more and more people are interested in what The Joint offers - narcotic- and opioid-free pain relief. And Holt knows that the best way to persuade new patients to try The Joint is to have patients share their stories.

Accordingly, there's a campaign to solicit those stories from patients, he says. Because while he or a franchisee can share stories of success, the most meaningful ones come from patients who had a positive experience - especially those whose pain was relieved. The winning formula, then, is to combine a great customer story that pushes a franchisee to the top of a search result page for pain treatment close to home, with ads targeted through Facebook, Yelp, or Instagram. This all supports The Joint's mission to improve quality of life, an idea that appeals to what Holt calls "an amazingly wide base." And all he has to do is find them.

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