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Organic Connection: Driving organic produce category growth

By

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How does your organic produce section measure up with your competition in the way of item variety, location and size?

A produce director called me recently and asked what the latest trends were in the organic produce sector. I told him it was expansion, but some of my observations of produce departments revealed a potpourri of various sizes.

Most retailers are doing a good job supporting organic produce. Most are stocking a variety of items, setting large retail displays, using special signage and running weekly ad promotions. Then, there are some organic sections that have been pared back by grocery store operators. This is a huge mistake since consumers are trending toward seeking more healthy food benefits. Those consumers are leaning toward fresh organic produce, which is approximately 40 percent of all organic food sales.

Data confirms organic produce is still growing in popularity. It requires a willingness to merchandise and promote in order to drive growth.

This business is still mainly about merchandising in order to build sales and growth. Nothing happens until you sell something. If a company wants great sales results, it has to go after it with motivation. When you cut back on displays, you cut back sales. It's as simple as that. So, if the organic produce sections are trimmed back, so go the sales — as well as the profit.

The displays must be powerful and aggressive, and this merchandising philosophy is simple. If you want to grow a specific category or item you have to do three things:

- Educate consumers
- Merchandise aggressively
- Promote the living daylights out of it.

The single-most need in getting the organic movement to advance further is knowledge. Communicating within the industry and with consumers is the key to reaching untapped business.

In order to capture new customers, it's necessary to educate those non-organic individuals. Without that knowledge, it's difficult to increase that attendance in the arena.

Here are some ways to go about growing organic produce sales:

- Size — Refrain from cramping organic items into limited space. The category is growing fast. Widen your display areas to attract more customers to it.
- Color — We certainly have the color in produce. Put some art into the product for a stunning presentation.
- Exposure — Keep stocking levels to a maximum. The more product you make available, the more shoppers tend to buy. Use a table endcap to promote two or three organic items in a similar way that you would conventional produce. Get the organic in front of the customer's face.
- Focal Point — Give your organic section an eye-catching captivation by improving the product visibility. Merchandise it with the feeling of a natural point of purchase stimuli.
- Signage — Use signs to tell short stories about items, the farmers and health facts to provide information for customers. Nicely designed signs will encourage sales.

Concentrate on boosting your organic produce by showing it off. Place at least one weekly featured organic item up front along with the advertised conventional specials. This will make the shoppers aware that your company promotes healthy eating.

The more you support popular trending products by making them visible, the more your organic customers will choose your store as their main shopping preference.

If your organic options are minimal and you don't have devoted sections available, customers will perceive it as negative. Those customers will simply rely on your competitors for their organic produce needs.

You only have two choices — advance along with organic growth or suffer the consequences of a sales decline.

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