

# Benchmarking Challenges and

For many in the natural and organic products movement, marketing their product began with the live demo, first to their friends and neighbors, then to the local natural foods store. It began with a high degree of enthusiasm and belief in the goodness of their food or product. Many of the early pioneers went from store to store convincing the store owners, their staff and their customers of the value of their offerings. They demoed their products, lectured to whoever would listen and created information-rich labels and brochures. This was their core marketing plan, and through these efforts early companies flourished.

Since its early days, the natural products industry has grown and matured. Today, according to SPINS, natural products is a \$23 billion market, growing at a healthy rate of 9.2 percent, and organics makes up almost \$7.5 billion of those sales, with sales growth at 8.8 percent.

During this span of time something else happened that impacted the way all products are marketed. Before the internet, there was print, radio, television and outdoor advertising, as well as public relations (PR), direct mail, catalogs and brochures. Today, many companies are incorporating more and more web-based marketing tactics and media to generate interest and sales, from search engine optimization (SEO) and pay per click (PPC) advertising to social media, mobile marketing, the blogosphere—and it seems like more new technologies are emerging every day.

But how much has the online revolution changed the way natural and organic products and foods are marketed?

Is it possible to market the taste and texture of an organic yogurt in an email? With all the technological advancements in the marketing world, what tools are natural and organic companies using to capture the attention of their target audience? What is working for them right now?

Pure Research, the research arm of Pure Branding, looked for any recent report on how natural products are marketed and came up empty. That's when we decided to conduct our own research, the end result being the *Natural*



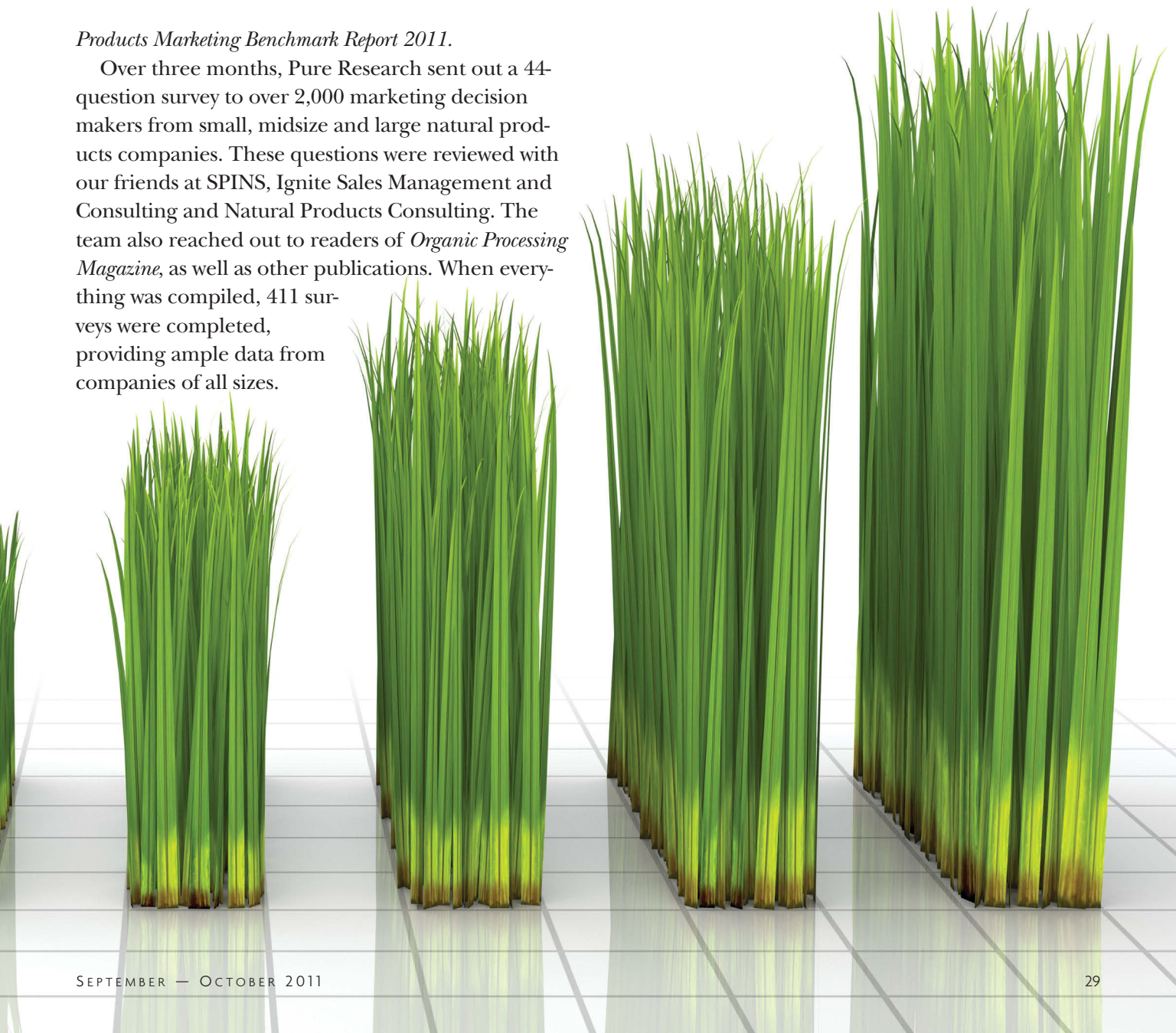
TS IN 2011 AND BEYOND:

# Top Tactics

By Yadim Medore

*Products Marketing Benchmark Report 2011.*

Over three months, Pure Research sent out a 44-question survey to over 2,000 marketing decision makers from small, midsize and large natural products companies. These questions were reviewed with our friends at SPINS, Ignite Sales Management and Consulting and Natural Products Consulting. The team also reached out to readers of *Organic Processing Magazine*, as well as other publications. When everything was compiled, 411 surveys were completed, providing ample data from companies of all sizes.



## Why a Benchmark?

Most major conventional corporations would not think about creating a marketing plan without some market data—and there are plenty of studies out there to help the big guys make informed, strategic decisions on everything from how much should be spent on a marketing budget to what tactics are the most and least effective. The natural products industry, however, is still a niche market and cannot be lumped in with other types of consumer products. Before this *Benchmark Report*, organic and natural product marketers had to rely on anecdotal information.

The goal with this report was to provide real, targeted statistical data that can be used to guide decision making—information that marketing professionals can take to their CEOs when setting the budget or deciding which marketing effort to focus the company’s time and money on.

What do your peers believe to be the most pressing marketing challenges and the most effective marketing tactics? These questions and others are addressed in this article.

## Organic vs. Natural Marketers

Remember those pioneers of the industry—the ones who believed fervently in the mission of their products? That persona lives strongly in the natural foods industry today—*especially* in certified organic companies.

When all 411 marketing decision makers surveyed were asked, “What brought you to the natural products industry,” and could choose two answers out of nine, 28 percent said “personal values” and 27 percent said “I believe in the mission.” Only 1 percent said “compensation,” while others said “chance,” “new business challenges,” “location” or “company culture.” In another question that asked respondents how they felt about marketing natural products, 39 percent said it is primarily about “living their personal values in the workplace.”

These numbers are undoubtedly higher than those likely to be found in much of corporate America. Interestingly, though, when respondents from the *Benchmark Report* were broken down into those who sell organic products versus those who sell natural products, the difference was even more dramatic. Out of those who sell organic products, 52 percent said they entered the industry because of their per-

“The goal with this report was to provide real, targeted statistical data that can be used to guide decision making—information that marketing professionals can take to their CEOs.”

sonal values and 43 percent began working in this industry mainly because they believe in the mission. This means people in the organic industry were twice as likely compared with the total group to be drawn into the industry because of their values. Furthermore, 69 percent of those in organic feel that marketing their products is all about living their personal values. Clearly this is a passionate group driven by values they hold dear.

## Challenges in Marketing Natural: The Price of Confusion

Even though the industry as a whole is experiencing healthy growth, marketers face many challenges, the biggest of which is confusion.

When asked, “What are your greatest external challenges in marketing natural or organic products?” respondents were allowed to choose up to three out of 11 possible options (Figure 1). Two of the top answers directly pointed to confusion: “confusion between natural and organic” (38

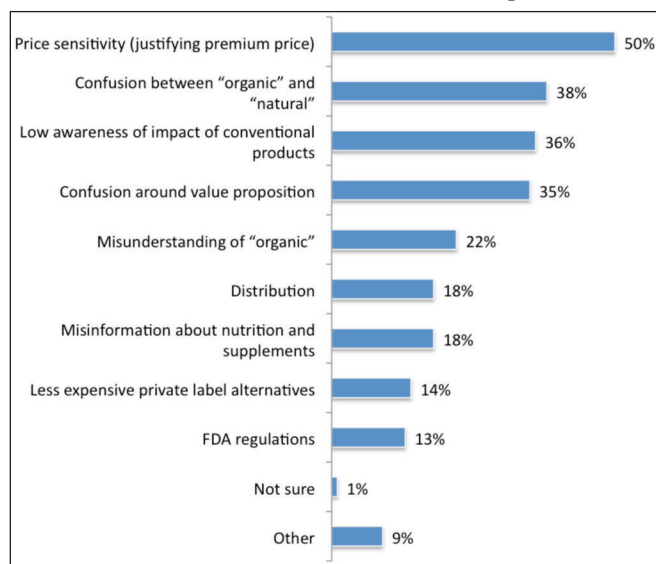


Figure 1: Greatest external challenges faced in marketing natural or organic products (percent)

percent) and “confusion around the value proposition” (35 percent). The value proposition conveys the distinct benefits that your product offers in comparison to competitors. Additionally, “low awareness of the impact of conventional products” was chosen by 36 percent. With this lack of clarity, it is no wonder that many marketers (50 percent) say their greatest challenge is helping consumers understand and justify the premium price of organic and natural products.

## What Does “Natural” Mean?

At the root of much of this confusion is the fact there is no universal definition of “natural” within the U.S. food system. When asked to define a natural product, marketers tend to define what it is not, rather than what it is, with 46 percent saying it is any product that is not synthetic. Organic marketers are a bit more proactive than their natural coun-

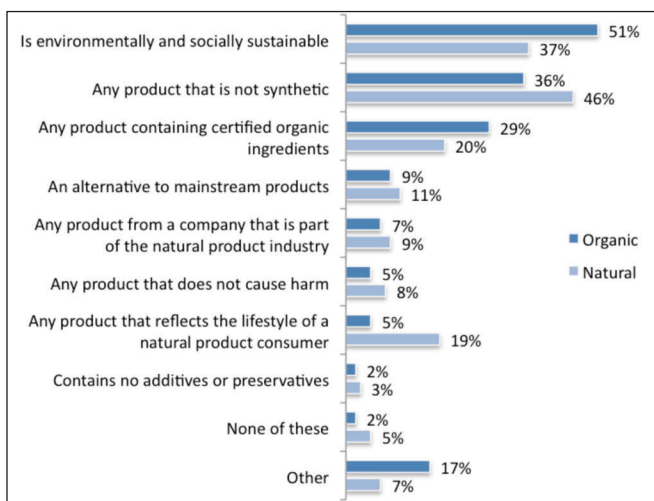


Figure 2: Which of the following statements best reflects how you would define a natural product?

terparts, with 51 percent saying a natural product is environmentally and socially sustainable, and 36 percent identifying it as not synthetic (Figure 2).

The lack of a universal definition of “natural,” together with the widespread, unregulated use of this term in marketing and labeling, is likely the root of much consumer confusion. Marketers of organic, as well as natural, find this confusion problematic when trying to compete with conventional food and supplement products. This is likely why 74 percent of natural and 76 percent of organic products marketers want regulation of the term “100 percent natural.”

### Challenges for Organic Marketers, Specifically

The issue of confusion goes beyond simply understanding “what is natural?” As the second-highest ranked external challenge overall, “confusion between organic and natural” is a key area of frustration.

While organic is defined by federal regulation and organic companies must meet strict standards and pay certification costs, “natural” has no guidelines governing its use. One of the things our research team has discovered over the years is the antipathy among some organic producers about the word “natural.” Their concern is that it co-opts much of the meaning of organic. The *Benchmark Report* confirmed this suspicion, with 20 percent of all respondents identifying “natural products” as “any product containing certified organic ingredients.”

But organic manufacturers should not be pointing fingers at anyone, since 29 percent of them also said the definition of a natural product is “any product containing certified organic ingredients.” This may be because they feel that products that contain certified organic ingredients are more “natural.” It may also be that many organic marketers believe that any product claiming to be natural *should* include organic ingredients. While this may be true in an ideal world, it is not the reality of today’s marketplace, and

thus is something marketing needs to address.

As mainstream consumers begin to explore alternatives to conventional foods, “natural” is likely to be an easier term for these crossover consumers to comprehend. Meanwhile, the term “organic” is more complex and appeals most to those who understand the layers of regulations and checks and balances behind the claim. There are still many who don’t really understand what organic means, though—22 percent of those surveyed said the top challenge was “misunderstanding surrounding the definition of organic.” The key to this, and all consumer confusion, comes down to education and awareness.

### Internal Challenges

Education and awareness are key roles of marketing, but most budgets don’t allot much to combat the existing confusion. According to the survey, the biggest internal challenge marketers of organic and natural products face is budget limitations (53 percent). This should not be a big revelation since every marketer would like a bigger budget. However, many natural and organic companies have no real budget for marketing at all—29 percent of those surveyed said their company did not historically invest in marketing. Consequently, there has been a lack of sophistication in marketing and very few data-driven marketing strategies.

One possible reason for this is what is called “founder’s syndrome.” Over 40 percent of the marketing decision makers in the survey pool were CEOs/founders, and this was not just for small companies. It is often the case at natural product companies that even as the company grows, the founder remains heavily involved in the details and postpones relinquishing control of the outward expression of the company. For many, the brand is an expression of the founder. For organizations founded on principles, the founder closely identifies with the cause, and stays close to all the expressions of the organizations in a very personal way. Data-driven marketing does not hold much sway against the personal beliefs of the founder.

An example of how long-held beliefs can run counter to the data came to light when companies were asked what they were doing to overcome their marketing challenges. Forty-five percent said they were attempting to expand distribution, even though they didn’t name distribution as one of their top challenges. Distribution also doesn’t address confusion, awareness or value proposition—the challenges that did actually top the list. Perhaps this is a case of choosing a tactic with the least resistance, but it is wrongheaded. In the *Benchmark Report*, SPINS data shows that the real growth comes from supporting your existing distribution rather than pursuing expanded distribution. This calls for marketing focused on differentiation and clarifying your value proposition.

## No Metrics to Gauge ROI Leads to Small Budgets

One very surprising result was how many organic and natural companies fail to measure their marketing's ROI and brand awareness. Only 39 percent of natural products marketers actually have a method for quantifying the ROI from their marketing programs (Figure 3), and only 25 percent have a method for quantifying brand awareness (Figure 4).

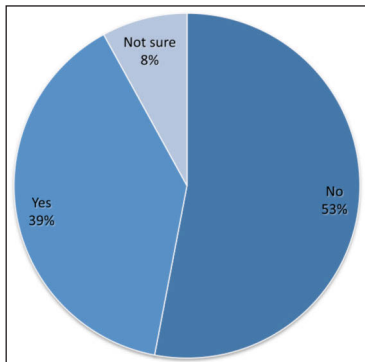


Figure 3: Method for quantifying brand awareness (percent)

Setting up the analytics and tracking ROI can seem complex, which is probably why larger companies are more likely to track marketing ROI than smaller ones. Some formulas not only look at gross profit from a single campaign, but also calculate the “consumer lifetime value,” or the measure of profit that would be generated by a consumer over the lifetime with your company. It gets even more challenging when you have many marketing efforts going on at once. All in all, there are many metrics—from consumer interest and brand

awareness to sales figures—that can be taken into consideration when calculating ROI. Explaining these could fill up an entire article by itself, and there are software programs and professionals who can help organize these metrics into something easier to navigate.

While measuring ROI can be complex, it doesn't have to be a huge undertaking—start small, but *start*. Conduct a comparative test between similar stores with consistent sales patterns that are willing to share sales data. Launch a marketing campaign in one store and do nothing different in the other store. Be sure to keep tabs on all additional expenses used for the campaign. Or test out how well different messages are received via web marketing that drives consumers to purchase products online, a process that is much easier to track.

Regardless of the reason for not measuring the ROI of your marketing, you can't manage what you can't measure. If

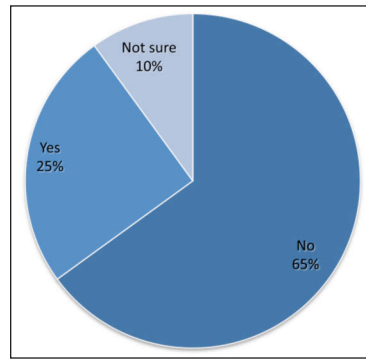


Figure 4: Method for quantifying the ROI

# Tradin Organics USA, Inc.

We welcome you to visit us!

## NATURAL PRODUCTS EXPO EAST

September 22–24<sup>th</sup>, 2011  
Booth #1808 / 1908 **SunOpta**

## The leading source for all your organic commodities

- Juices, Purees & Concentrates
- Frozen Fruits & Vegetables
- Cocoa Products
- Sweeteners/Agave
- Tomato
- Nuts
- Dried Fruit
- Grains
- Oils & Fats
- Pulses
- Seeds
- Animal Feed



Tradin Organics USA, Inc. | 2100 Delaware Avenue | Santa Cruz | California 95060  
Phone (831) 685-6565 | Fax (831) 685-6505 | [info@tradinorganicsusa.com](mailto:info@tradinorganicsusa.com) | [www.tradinorganic.com](http://www.tradinorganic.com)

you can't prove the value of past marketing, especially to companies that have traditionally not emphasized marketing, you will have a hard time justifying increases. On the other hand, if you have solid data, you can prove what works and what doesn't and the company can strategically choose which efforts to invest in and work to improve returns over time.

### Budget as Percent of Revenues

One metric to consider when evaluating a marketing budget is the percentage of sales it represents. The average marketing dollars spent for all natural products companies (small, midsize and large) is only 3.26 percent of sales. When breaking this down into small (less than \$1 million in sales), midsize (between \$1 million to \$15 million) and large (more than \$15 million) companies, the percentages change. For small companies, the average marketing budget is 13 percent of sales. For midsize, it's 5.3 percent of sales, and for large, it's 3.5 percent.

This shows that smaller companies need to invest a greater percentage of their revenues to get their products noticed, and that, as a company grows, marketing gets a smaller percent of the overall budget. Also, there is a minimum cost of entry into the natural products marketplace (trade show fees, retailer and distributor fees, distributor

and retailer advertising, etc.), which explains where much of a smaller company's marketing budget goes.

How does this compare with other industries? Is the natural products industry particularly thrifty with its marketing dollars? Packaged goods in other industries typically cite the figure of 6 to 10 percent of revenue. That number increases to 20 percent or more when launching a new product or introducing a product into a new distribution channel.

Natural products companies should take note of this last comment since many are branching out from traditional natural channels and going into grocery stores, drugstores and mass merchandisers. Natural and organic companies entering the mainstream market may find it difficult to compete with conventional brands that invest far more in marketing.

### Real Dollars

Percentages don't pay for an ad in *Organic Processing* or booth space at Natural Products Expo West or a live demo. So what are the real dollars being spent in trade and consumer marketing?

To begin with, the split in spending favors the consumer, with on average 57 percent of the budget going to consumer marketing and 43 percent toward trade marketing

## Advice From Natural and Organic Marketers Themselves

So what sage advice do current natural and organic marketing professionals have to offer? Here are a few tips from the participants in the survey. *Note: These are direct quotes and do not necessarily reflect the views of the authors of the Benchmark Report.*

### Financial Advice

1. Spend your marketing dollars very carefully. There are many options, but very few will give you the exposure and return you desire.
2. Increase marketing budget substantially. Sell *fun*, not *frump*. Sell on the up, not on what organics don't have.
3. Pay attention to high costs of creating and differentiating a brand. Getting the distribution is only part of the success.
4. Do not sacrifice profitability for growth.
5. Don't market a commodity product that requires significant consumer education without adequate funding.

### Research Advice

1. The times are different, the market is different and past experience is not necessarily relevant. Try to find what is relevant today.
2. Understand your customers' pain points first and then work on creating a product that services that pain point.
3. Engage your customers to gain insight into their needs (product and information), buying patterns, etc. and from there work on developing targeted marketing materials.
4. Maintain internal communication of brand strategy and frequent updates supporting successes (trade feedback, consumer feedback, media attention, etc.).
5. Analyze your consumer and her values. Generation G is the new consumer who expects from brands more than products.

### Strategic Advice

1. Have a strategic focus. Decide what you are going to do and align your resources behind that goal or goals (no more than three). Do not get distracted by what you didn't do when one of your goals begins to falter (it will).
2. Be open minded and step outside your comfort zone to reach more local markets while using the internet to reach global markets.
3. Have both marketing and sales understand mutual company goals and create a plan around that.
4. Internal as well as external communication is the key to success. Natural products have to be explained even more in order to underline their advantages.
5. Be honest and don't try to compete with the schlocky marketers on their level.
6. Spend money on raising awareness for core products rather than development of too many new ones.
7. If you are going to expand into mainstream channels, make sure you have a realistic pricing strategy.

### Tactical Advice

1. Work with like-minded companies (build partnerships). Leverage social media (cost effective). Create stories consumers can tell. Be disciplined (you know you have a strategy when you say "no" to things).
2. Set a clear goal & use imaginative guerrilla marketing. Position the product and the brand with the target consumer group as not only a health benefit but also as a lifestyle enhancement.
3. Do your best to focus efforts. Performing one marketing tactic well is better than committing to several tactics and executing them on a less-than-excellent level.

such as trade shows and advertising with distributors, etc. A large part of the trade budget goes directly to retailers. These marketing or sales “fees” are accepted as the cost of doing business with retailers and distributors, but whether they have any true marketing value is debatable. In fact, several of them, including unauthorized deductions, retailer fees and distributor fees, are often referred to as “nonworking” marketing expenses.

Regarding the consumer side, the majority of companies surveyed spend less than \$100,000 a year on their consumer marketing. In fact, almost half of the companies spend less than \$50,000, and when you break it down by company size, you see the disadvantage inherent in being a smaller company.

- The majority of small companies spend less than \$10,000.
- The majority of midsize companies spend between \$10,000 and \$250,000.
- The majority of large companies spend between \$500,000 and \$10,000,000.

However you slice it, there is usually not enough money slotted for marketing, especially when considering the major challenges that organic and natural companies face such as awareness and confusion.


Marketing budgets are on the rise, however. Almost half of the marketing decision makers said they would be increasing their marketing budgets for this year. It appears that bigger companies are investing in marketing to get even bigger, while smaller companies plan on being more conservative with their marketing budgets. Only 25 percent of large companies are going to stay the course with their current marketing budgets, compared with 30 percent of midsize companies and 35 percent of small companies. When you do the math, a 10 percent increase of the \$10,000 budget of a typical small company is only \$1,000, while a 10 per-


cent increase of a \$1 million budget is \$100,000. The former might buy one small advertisement in a magazine, while the latter may be enough to finance a campaign or take an existing campaign to a whole new level.

### Top 10 Marketing Tactics

With tight budgets and a multitude of marketing options, natural products companies need to be careful where they spend their dollars. The *Benchmark Report* presented 34 tactics and asked marketing decision makers to rank them in terms of use (Figure 5). What was found is that the natural products industry has one foot in online marketing and the other in traditional forms of marketing.

# Your Partner In Product Success!







Custom Base Design




Healthy Ingredient Options



Expertise in Latest Flavor Technology



Product Development Solutions



EATEM FOODS COMPANY  
 Vineland Industrial Park  
 1829 Gallagher Drive, Vineland, NJ 08360  
 Phone: 800-683-2836 FAX (856) 692-0847  
[www.eatemfoods.com](http://www.eatemfoods.com) [sales@eatemfoods.com](mailto:sales@eatemfoods.com)










Figure 5: Marketing tactics used

Five of the top 10 tactics used are online, including:

- Website (63 percent)
- Facebook (63 percent)
- Email newsletter (51 percent)
- Twitter (42 percent)
- Online advertising (40 percent)

The other five are the more traditional forms of marketing that have worked for them in the past:

- Sales collateral (52 percent)
- Live demos (48 percent)
- Coupons (43 percent)
- PR (40 percent)
- Event marketing (40 percent)

### Most Effective

In terms of effectiveness, the split between online and offline was similar, with five online (website, Facebook, email newsletter, email, buzz marketing) and five offline (live demo, television advertising, coupons, print advertising and event marketing) (Figure 6).

Out of all of these, the live demo is ranked as most effective by those selling organic food. Some things haven't changed since the early days, and organic and natural products companies see the live demo as highly effective at driving sales and increasing brand awareness and retailer loyalty. However, while the results are proven in terms of sales dur-

ing and immediately following a live demo, less apparent is its actual return on investment. Live demos are usually very costly, and if the immediate ROI from a single event were to be calculated, it is not likely to be very high. This, however, doesn't take into consideration the long-term effects on each consumer's buying pattern.

Second most effective is the company's website, the hub of all its online activities. If there is a surprise, it is that 37 percent of respondents did *not* include it as one of their used tactics. Also of interest is that large companies feel that their websites are not as effective as their smaller and medium-size counterparts believe they are. Websites are most effective as a way to drive sales inquiries and increase brand awareness. They are also a great resource for information, which explains why those products that require a higher degree of engagement (personal care and supplements) find them more useful than the more impulse-driven categories like foods and beverages.



Figure 6: Most and least effective marketing tactics

Third most effective is television advertising. What needs to be said about this tactic is that very few actually use it (second to last in usage), but those that do find it very effective in increasing brand awareness and driving sales. One reason for this is that there are not that many natural or organic brands to compete against on TV, so the products stand out.

With over 700 million Facebook users, natural products

marketers are clearly drawn to the reach of this social network platform, making it the fourth most effective tactic. Effective for listening and interacting with customers, Facebook is also best for increasing brand awareness and increasing customer loyalty, marketers noted. Many have called social media marketing the level playing field, since the cost of entry is the same for all. This explains why smaller natural companies find Facebook far more effective than large ones.

Rounding out the top five in effectiveness are coupons. Coupons tend to be used by midsize to large companies. Smaller companies shy away from their complexity, yet find them to be very effective when used, especially in the nonorganic food and beverage category. Organic food companies surveyed, however, don't find them as effective. The data does not tell us why exactly. Perhaps, in the case of organic foods, where core consumers buy on quality rather than price, organic marketers might feel that consumers are less influenced by a coupon offering a discount. Still, coupons may be a way to get consumers to get over the initial obstacle of price, which has been stated as the number one reason why consumers don't buy organic and was found in the *Benchmark Report* to be the biggest challenge for organic and natural marketers.

### Least Effective

LinkedIn, webinars, blogging, online training and sponsorships were ranked as the least effective methods of marketing. Seeing that four out of these five are web-based, the problem may not be that these are less effective (many other industries swear by them), but more that natural products companies are comfortable with tried-and-true tactics and less committed to some of the newer online ones.

Given the importance of business-to-business relationships in the natural products industry, and that LinkedIn

will only grow in influence (it's adding 1 million new members a week), the possibility is strong that it will be used more effectively in the future to network with retailers, wholesalers and distributors.

Knowing how much natural products and organic companies love in-person tactics, it should be no surprise that less face-to-face options like webinars and online training rank low in effectiveness. Generally, these are used for informing retailers, brokers and distributors. The extremely low numbers show that natural and organic products companies either have never tried a webinar or that the online education movement has come and gone for them. Whatever the reason, this industry does not embrace the training potential of the web. And as this in-

# OF COURSE, YOUR CUSTOMERS RELY ON YOU.

# SO WHO DO YOU RELY ON?

Why not rely on the company that didn't wait  
for stricter food safety/quality standards:

**SunOpta™**  
Grains and Foods Group

Because at SunOpta, this is, and has been, standard operating procedure.

From field to table, we control every step for all our soy, corn and sunflower products. This includes sustainable farming practices, natural processing and packaging.

But then—we go one step further. We offer a Traceability Integrity Program (TIP),

which requires testing, documentation and certification at every phase of our production.

Your customers expect a lot from you. Expect the same from us at SunOpta.



1.800.297.5997.Ext.116 [foodinfo@sunopta.com](mailto:foodinfo@sunopta.com) [sunopta.com/foods](http://sunopta.com/foods)

dustry also does not engage in marketing ROI, we doubt many have evaluated the ROI difference between an online event and in-person training.

Natural and organic products companies ranked blogging in the middle of used tactics, but third to last in effectiveness. Remarkably, in other industries, blogging is consistently regarded as one of the most effective of the inbound marketing tactics. Blogging takes time and effort, however, and it requires consistency and interesting content if you want to succeed. Those that do blog in this industry do so sporadically, and don't put much emphasis on it. This is a lost opportunity, since creating content is going to be more and more important. According to the Custom Content Council, 73 percent of consumers prefer to get information from a company in the form of articles over an advertisement. In online searches, search engines favor fresh, specific content, and blogs often perform well.

The only offline tactic that landed in the bottom five is sponsorships. While the consensus among the marketing decision makers is that sponsorships are not as effective as other methods, it's not for lack of trying. Almost 40 percent of midsize and large natural companies sponsor something, though more by way of a donation than a tactic that will

drive sales. Those that connect their cause marketing directly with their company values and promote it through their website, product labels and other marketing find sponsorships to be more effective in driving sales.

## Social Media

When combined, all of the social media tactics (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and blogging) make up a large amount of the marketing efforts of natural products companies, but for many companies the impact is minimal. For example, the average number of Facebook followers for a natural products company is 1,898, and the average number of Twitter followers is 1,269. What makes these numbers even less significant is the fact that the real metric that counts is the level of engagement. This is measured by the percentage of your followers who visit your company Facebook page on average each month, and if you get 1 percent, you are doing well. At 1 percent, that would mean the average natural products Facebook company page is engaging with 19 people. While the natural products industry has entered the social media waters enthusiastically, most marketers have a long way to go before they make it truly effective. This doesn't mean you should abandon these ef-

## Blogging Natural and Organic Products—5 Easy Ways to Get Started

If there was ever an industry ripe for blogging, it has to be the organic and natural products industry. There are countless stories behind the products, and each is often tied to a larger cause, such as sustainability, fair trade, organic agriculture, holistic healing, environmental responsibility, global warming and locally grown. While blogging can be very effective, few organic companies do it regularly.

To make it easier, here are five tips to start and maintain an effective blog:

- 1. Write to your audience.** Blogs are not just about you and your company. They are about communicating to your customers. Make a list of what your audience is interested in and from that list figure out what topics you feel most comfortable talking about. You now have the start of an editorial calendar.
- 2. Create an editorial calendar.** From your list plot out a timetable for when the blog posts should be written, and by whom. This'll provide deadlines. Without deadlines, you will have no posts. Make sure when you assign your blog posts that you get buy-in from your writers and have it in writing. To avoid scrambling, plot out your editorial calendar for about three months, and revisit it every month.
- 3. Keywords.** Part of the reason you blog is to help your website's search engine optimization (SEO). You should confer with those who are in charge of your SEO and determine the most important keyword phrases. Don't go for broad terms like "organic." Instead, try to figure those keywords that someone might use in Google when looking for a product like yours. Select up to 20, then make sure your blog post headline and first couple of paragraphs include at least one of these.
- 4. Style and length.** Blogs are not corporate-speak. Nor are they brochures

that need approval from everyone in the company. The style of the blog should reflect the combined personality of the writer and the company. What this means is that whomever you choose to write your blogs, you should trust her. You may want someone to proof what she writes, but don't put it through the writing gantlet. Too many blog posts die in a CEO's mailbox. And as for length, you can write it as long as you want, but remember, people on the web have short attention spans. The ideal length is between 400-800 words. You can't make much of a point in 200 words (unless it's a visually oriented blog), and over 800, it had better be riveting.

- 5. Images and multimedia matter.** If you have beautiful pictures of your fields or emotionally powerful pictures of who you are helping, you now have a great place to feature them. Plus, images and videos on blogs not only attract the reader, but they also break up the text, making for a more enjoyable reading experience. Furthermore, you can add an "alt tag" into the images, which is great for search. The alt tag is the written meta-text attached to an image to help the search engines identify what the picture is. This is important since Google, Yahoo! and Bing are not yet able to identify images by themselves. So does the alt tag really matter? You'd be surprised at how many people search in the images section of Google, and if they stumble on your scintillating blog, you may have attracted a new customer.

So start the process. Kick-start or reinvigorate your blog today, and within several months you'll be pleasantly surprised how much better you're communicating with your target audience and how much better your keywords are ranking on Google.

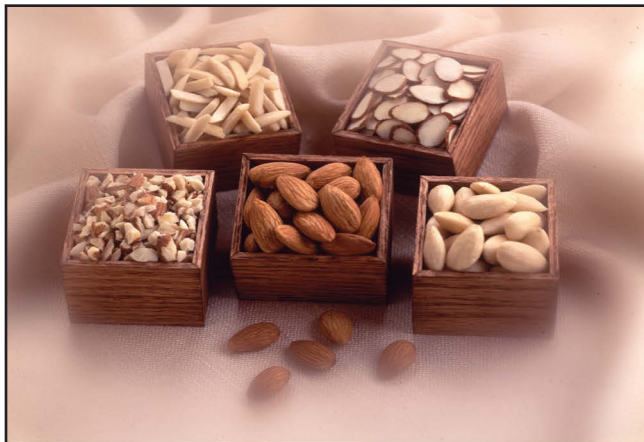
forts. There is a large opportunity for creative and energetic natural products companies to take full advantage of the power of social media. One out of eight minutes spent online is on Facebook. That is a huge and engaged audience, and large natural products companies like Tom's of Maine (more than 260,000 likes) and Stonyfield Farms (more than 85,000 likes) are already successfully interacting with them.

### The Future

Clearly, marketing natural and organic products is not the same as it was 20 years ago, or 10 years for that matter. While there is enthusiasm for new tactics like Facebook, there seems to be a hesitancy to really embrace others like blogging, which can be very effective and presents a chance to tell a story—one of the key points of difference natural products have over conventional products. Just as with traditional marketing approaches, to make any new media tactic effective, the commitment must be strong.

ROI and brand awareness must be measured throughout all marketing efforts if natural and organic companies want to break away from the past of minimal marketing budgets. And if they want to compete against conventional companies, they will have to commit to bigger marketing budgets. They will also have to work on improving their value propositions. This has dual benefits. First, a clear value proposition will help clarify and differentiate the meaning of organic vs. natural. Second, a compelling value proposition will justify the pricing of the product.

With the publishing of the *Benchmark Report*, marketing decision makers can identify the issues and challenges. Now that they know the problems, they can begin to solve them. □



### ORGANIC ALMONDS

Natural, Blanched, Roasted, Whole, Sliced, Diced, Slivered



**Big Tree  
Organic Farms**

*a grower owned marketing cooperative*

California Grown Organic Almonds since 1998

Certified Organic by California Certified Organic Farmers, Santa Cruz, CA



209-669-3678

[www.bigtreeorganic.com](http://www.bigtreeorganic.com)



### Organic Certification

National and International  
Services



- » ORGANIC CERTIFICATION
- » EDUCATION
- » ADVOCACY
- » EXPERIENCE AND QUALITY

» GET THE MOST OUT OF ORGANIC CERTIFICATION  
CALL OREGON TILTH TODAY 503.378.0690 [www.tilth.org](http://www.tilth.org)