

Case Study:
Whole Foods Market



Paula M Burke

Southern New Hampshire University

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The organic natural food industry is booming as many products are emerging with more palatable recipes. Many local community shoppers are demanding the highest safety and quality foods on the market. Consumers make strides everyday to get healthier searching for a more cleaner, organic type of food plan. This healthier trend requires a dedicated company that has vision to commit to wellness for people and the planet. One company that is a passionate leader for healthy organic products is the Whole Foods Market grocery chain. The Whole Foods Market focuses its energy on a strong set of safety standards for their food with the protection of animals and sustainability for packaging (Whole Foods Market, 2014). The Whole Foods Market stands out from other competitive grocers as it thrives in an interactive approach to reaching their customers as well as the community they serve. The leadership and employees of the company endorse a progressive social media footprint for their marketing communications campaign. The Whole Foods Market embraces the core values of educating the public on the value of eating more organic food. The company believes in inspiring their vision and social brand. The Whole Foods Market digital marketing strategy is highly successful in monitoring the wants and needs of their customers. One of the best ways to reach their target audience is through their many social networking feeds utilizing the company, Twitter.

The Whole Foods story begins in 1980 in the city of Austin, Texas. The vision originates from four local people believing that natural food products would be a great food line to explore into a larger store as in a supermarket format design (Whole Foods Market, 2014). Through many unforeseen events such as floods and lost revenue; the dedication of the hard work of many customers and employees keeps the original store opened for business. As time progresses, the market chain expands and begins to partner and buy up other natural food stores. Their strategy

of growth evolves the company into a formidable grocer. Today, the Whole Foods Market is a publicly traded company with over 300 hundred locations in North America and the United Kingdom (Stelzner, 2010).

The Whole Foods Market marketing playbook is a great asset as its strategy is a holistic marketing approach to target the niche market of each local community store. The marketing strategy reaches their core audience of younger educated people seeking out a more plant-based brand of foods that are organic and free of many chemicals and pesticides.

Through the vision of the Whole Foods Market Interactive Art Director, Marla Erwin, the company launches its first social media program utilizing Twitter. The first handle is named [Twitter.com/Wholefoods](https://twitter.com/Wholefoods) with a million Twitter followers in the first year. Ms. Erwin pays attention and shares the one common point that makes the strategy so effective; just connect with people. The intent of the strategy is first thought to be more to inform the public of the Fair Trade programs and philanthropy projects. However the uses of the twitter feeds become customer centric with the program really flourishing to serve as a strong platform for their customer feedback (Stelzner, 2010).

The Whole Foods Market monitor their twitter key words as each of the individual stores will jump right in to relevant conversations to be engaging to the customer offering the highest service. The Whole Foods Market philosophy is to answer customer questions and be involved in weekly chats to follow selective tweets that share a common relationship with their many brands. The Whole Foods Market utilizes Hootsuite social media tools to manage their activity and analytics. The analytic portion of the product offers the Whole Foods Market the combination of real-time social analysis converting their results into revenue (hootsuite, 2014). The Hootsuite power is the ability to set up posts that go out to more than one product running a bigger

marketing campaign giving back statistics and web links (Needleman, 2009). The value proposition added for their social brand is the vast collaboration across the entire organization. There are many stores to track and a reliable stream of communication is paramount.

The Whole Foods Market responds very expeditiously to feedback. They seek out the customer and are highly proactive by implementing a customer feedback site called Get Satisfaction. Get Satisfaction is a community-powered support area for frequently asked questions, ideas and common issues (Whole Foods Market, 2014). There are topics posted with employees interacting to field questions and review the feedback streaming in. In addition there is an actively updated blog that will promote cooking videos, organic food news and company press release information. Comment sections are available for posting and viewing. The Whole Foods Market leadership is harnessing social media technology as they can see the metrics showing the market reach they are receiving from opening their social network channels. There are also Global RSS feeds as well for a list of all of the events or promotions in their various stores. The Whole Foods Market is actively evaluating their Google analytics for ways to interpret data and adjust any further deficiencies.

With any comprehensive digital footprint that is robust and bold in content there are inherent risks. When a company like the Whole Foods Market manages over 150 Twitter accounts there is going to be a potential viral buzz about issues and social change (Gordhamer, 2009). One area to ponder is the political fallout of an issue creating a viral twitter feed not favorable to their company brand. There are the political activism issues that impact the whole foods industry everyday. To provide one example references a California ballot initiative called Proposition 37 requiring labels to be placed on all genetically engineered foods. The Whole Foods Market did not initially support the state mandate that advocated for more government

regulation. There is the social media fallout that produces unpleasant feedback on their twitter feeds. In September 2011, the Whole Foods Market amends their first position and advocates for mandatory labeling of genetically engineered foods (Whole Foods Market, 2014). As the news will present, there are food safety issues and this is a heated topic for credible regulatory practices of organic farming with the balancing of world trade agreements. Whole Foods Market needs to diffuse the political feedback that many twitter feeds would release to the public but how? The forming of a special action committee remains active at the Whole Foods Market executive level to handle sensitive political issues that may go viral impacting their brand image. The Whole Foods Market would want to have a group of tactics in place to avoid any public relations threat. A team devoted exclusively to monitoring any threatening comments that provide a proactive resolution for the brand image. The company requires first all reliable source material to review before committing to an issue preventing any further social media fallout.

In summary, the Whole Foods Market is a highly successful organization managing a large social media footprint. They are a resilient company example that understands that the voice of the customer is what keeps their brand equity vibrant and competitive. Social media management program tools are vital to measuring all of the communication channels for the protection of the brand. There are going to be unforeseen headwinds that arrive in food safety and the protection of the environment. The empowerment of the whole company is the key to this brand preservation as the Whole Foods Market has cultivated a strong community of consumers. The leadership of the Whole Foods Market recognizes the best way to handle any unpleasant feedback is to take control and be transparent educating the consumer on a remedy to correct an issue. Their foods and stores are highly attractive to the public and remain a superior competitor in the natural foods industry.

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