

Q&A: FreshDirect CMO Tammy Berentson on Transparency, TikTok, and Thanksgiving Efforts

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FreshDirect, like nearly all brands, has had to listen, test, learn, and pivot amid the pandemic.

We recently spoke with Tammy Berentson, CMO at FreshDirect, about what that process was like, why transparency matters, and which channels the company relies on most.

How have your marketing efforts changed in recent months?

In March, April, and May, we scaled back a few of our efforts, but we found one of the most effective ways to reach our consumers was via organic social.

Social has certainly been a go-to channel for most marketers during the pandemic.

Yes, throughout social — Instagram, Facebook, or LinkedIn — we were writing updates about what was happening at FreshDirect and offering transparency into our business, along with all our recipes and cooking demos.

But offering consumers transparency, which I think they were really grateful for, [was important.] We got a fantastic response.

You mentioned a few social networks, but what about TikTok? It's an emerging platform, but is it something you're exploring?

We are exploring it. We have a lot of fantastic cooks internally, and many experts to draw on—from expert butchers to fishmongers—there's so much interesting content here. We are thinking about ways to leverage different channels, and TikTok is among them.

We often call our headquarters a Willy Wonka food factory or a food hive because there are so many experts and interesting things going on. The other day, I saw in our test kitchen that our lead fish merchant was making swordfish five different ways. We want to try bringing that to our consumers, and TikTok could be a cool place to do it.

In addition to social, direct mail is a big component of FreshDirect's marketing efforts. Do you find it's still an effective channel?

Definitely. Every time we draw up a campaign, we get direct responders coming in, and it's fairly predictable. We've definitely seen an increase in responses. But it's also a billboard. We have a very distinct brand. That's part of our secret weapon, too—our brand is so familiar visually.

Our direct mail pieces also serve as mini-billboards to people throughout the region, reminding them that we're here.

What's next on your road map?

From a marketing perspective, we're looking at the holidays like Thanksgiving. We're trying to, through research, understand what food we have coming in and how to serve our customers' needs best.

Will this year's Thanksgiving efforts differ from what you've done in the past?

I think we still have some thought to put into that. We have our traditional marketing mix, and we're very flexible. We're thinking about where people will be and where they choose to celebrate. A big asset

that we do have is flexibility. We'll probably allocate some research and marketing to try understanding that better, and we'll move with the customer.

We're very proud of our relationship that started earlier this year with New York Common Pantry, which serves New York City. We formed this alliance and started offering donations on our site, allowing our consumers to donate to the New York Common Pantry.

The pantry lost all its volunteers during the pandemic. So, we stepped in and did all the picking and packing here. My colleague Tim [Knoll, FreshDirect's COO] and his team and our merchants took on buying and delivering food using our trucks. We raised \$1.5 million to help them serve those in need.

Going into Thanksgiving, we're thinking about how to help them further by looking at different ways to volunteer through this difficult time when their need is so much greater than before [the pandemic] started.