



## Online mashup

When the Potato Jazz product from Rexford, Idaho-based Wilcox Fresh showed up on the Lifetime show *The Balancing Act*, the company also began marketing to customers through Facebook. “By going national and appealing to the two million women who watch the show on a daily basis, we recognized the need to ramp up what we do online,” says executive vice president of sales and marketing Jim Richter.

Idaho Falls, Idaho-based Potandon also turns to the Internet to generate excitement amongst its customers. To reach the younger generations the

company hosts a Twitter party. “Hundred, sometimes thousands, of people sign in and ask questions or offer suggestions,” says Ralph Schwartz, director of category management. “Our overall goal is to show the young new user that potatoes are fun, nutritious and easy to prep.”

“Older generations recognize potatoes as a staple in their diet but the younger generations don’t know how to prepare them,” says Lance Poole, vice president of sales for Idaho Falls, Idaho-based Eagle Eye Produce. “It’s important to reach out to them.”



varieties for sale in small single-use bags.

Organic potatoes are another category that claimed itself shelf space, although industry observers say organics’ popularity varies significantly by location. To address the difficulty retailers run into ringing individual organic potatoes —organics are typically identified with a sticker or tag that can easily fall off or be removed—Idaho Falls, Idaho-based Eagle Eye Produce introduced an individually-wrapped microwavable organic potato that is easily scanned at the cash register. The company also has a 2.5-lb. bag of baby organics on the market. “It’s a new thing for us and we’ve had great luck with it in the Northeast,” says Lance Poole, vice president of sales.

## Playful promotions

Potato displays can be exciting, just ask the Idaho Potato Commission (IDC) whose 20th annual Potato Lover’s Month retail display contest kicks off next month. The contest not only puts potatoes at the forefront of the produce department, it connects them with complementary products. IDC, based in Eagle, Idaho, coordinates many cross-promotions, says Seth Pemsler, vice president of retail and

international. “We’ve done several tie-in promotions with wines, pork and beef. A lot of the companies will put coupons for Idaho potatoes on their product.”

Meal deals are popular in most grocery categories. Traditionally, retailers have taken a ‘buy a lot and stack them high’ approach to potato inventory, says Stanger. “Groceries who put together meal deals, such as a roasted chicken, salad mix and bag of potatoes for \$10, are finding it works.”

“We learned from the Marsh Super Study that not every customer shops every department during their trip,” says Richter. “The study also showed that produce has the highest penetration of purchase success of any department.”

Cross-merchandising brings in impulse sales, but getting on the consumers shopping list is even better, and experts are recognizing that the best way to do so is talk to them directly. Richter, who used to work in retail as a produce manager, recognizes the value of communicating with the consumer to get them excited for his product. “When retailers get new item requests from customers, they take it very seriously. They want to be responsive to their shopper.” □

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