

Keys to a ‘far from ordinary’ marketing campaign

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, the Oregon Association of Nurseries started working with Pivot, the marketing agency where I am employed. In 2014, we had our first opportunity to work on advertising for the Farwest Show.

The first year, starting a little late in the season, we produced an ad with the headline “Find it all at Farwest” and an updated design — but it wasn’t enough.

OAN had made significant changes to the Farwest Show — new vendors, events and features — but audiences saw the marketing and assumed the show was the same.

In 2015, we proposed something bolder. We took the word “far” out of “Farwest” and turned what might be a liability — because Oregon can seem far away from some places — into an asset.

The new campaign for Farwest became “Far From Ordinary.”

To match the imagery to the message, we moved away from typical event marketing — no regular photos of plants, attendees or the like. Instead, we made a strong visual statement with the Farwest Fanatics, characters whose love of flowers, trees and bushes is so strong that foliage literally becomes part of who they are.

It’s a striking image that catches your attention. The plant people look just like you or me, but with a memorable twist.

“Far From Ordinary” generated positive buzz immediately. As prospective exhibitors and attendees connected with the flowery characters, excitement for the revamped Farwest Show grew. Each year since 2015, attendance has increased 6–10 percent, with an average of 45 new exhibitors each year.

Some attendees came to the show dressed in cosplay, bringing their own flower beards or wigs. OAN sponsored a photo booth where hundreds of people dressed as Farwest Fanatics.

The campaign continued to evolve into 2016. Last year’s Farwest Show attracted more than 6,300 horticulture professionals representing all 50 states and 18 countries. The OAN reported that when they exhibit

at trade shows around the country, people often stop by to tell them how fun and energizing the campaign is.

In addition to being interesting insight into the Farwest campaign, here are some takeaways you might use the next time you’re planning a marketing campaign:

Do something unexpected.

The Farwest Fanatics campaign has been a success, in part, because it is unexpected. Most nursery industry ads feature



plants and trees, or perhaps a gardener. These scenes from the world of nature are safe and appealing.

By comparison, the Farwest Fanatics are bold. They jump off the page and beg to be noticed, because, wait, does that man have plants for a beard?! Does that woman have flowers in — or as — her hair?! Unexpected isn’t always the right move, and you need to know your audience, but doing the right unexpected thing at the right time can be powerful.



Ian Doescher

Ian Doescher is the director of nonprofit marketing at Pivot Group, a marketing agency in Portland, Oregon. He can be reached at ian@askpivot.com.

Redefine your assets.

Was the term “Farwest” hurting the show, because for out-of-state attendees the name automatically sounds far away? OAN and Pivot changed that meaning to imply that Farwest is far from ordinary. Farwest is the show you need to go to because it’s going to give you much more than you expect. Are there potential liabilities to your business that you can help shape as assets for potential customers?

Match the reality to the advertising.

The Farwest Fanatics campaign would not have worked if the show itself remained the same. OAN has enhanced the show floor offerings, including increasing their free mini-sessions at the Grower Solution Center and the Retailer Idea Center, adding a new Farwest Happy Hour presented by Anderson Pots for 2017, and expanding the popular Pub Crawl. They made, and continue to make, the vital changes that make the show even better, so it matches the excitement of the Farwest Fanatics.

The best advertising is honest advertising: make sure the reality your customers experience matches the promises of your marketing materials.

The Farwest Fanatics campaign has been great fun for all of us at Pivot who have been involved with it. We helped find new audiences for the largest nursery industry show in the West, and we did so by partnering with the OAN to create bold campaigns. When you’re at Farwest this year, stop by and say hi — maybe you’ll find yourself donning a leaf beard or a flower wig, too. ☺