

By [Fresh Produce Marketing](#) founder Lisa Cork



His response was innocent enough, but it had me seeing red. He said, “Does the detail really matter, Lisa?” The conversation was over artwork I had sent to a printer and we were disagreeing about expectations. I ‘expected’ the print proof to exactly match the brand artwork I’d sent. His expectation was ‘close was close enough, after all, it’s only a small sticker’. It is a classic example of a very important point – whether the issue is big or small, if you don’t fight for your brand, no one else will.

My conversation raises an interesting debate about branding – especially in fresh produce. Given brands are expensive to create and require investment to maintain, is it worth it? Is it worthwhile to create a brand or are you better off just being a commodity?

To answer the ‘to brand or not to brand’ question, you have to ask yourself the following: “Do you do something different and does that difference have real or perceived trade or consumer value?” That’s the killer question and it’s that simple.

If we were in the packaged food business, a product is created with an idea. Take this CADO Avocado Frozen Dessert. A new and unique product, their home page notes: “Finally, a non-dairy ice cream that tastes like real ice cream! CADO IS THE FIRST AVOCADO-BASED, NON-DAIRY ICE CREAM WITH HEART-HEALTHY AVOCADO FAT”. Let’s think about how this product was created.

If you read their About blurb ([cadoicecream.com/about](http://cadoicecream.com/about)), this is a family business that was influenced by three key things. 1. They grew up loving ice cream but got disenfranchised with modern ice cream being made with cheaper ingredients and more fillers. 2. They were influenced by wanting to live a more plant based lifestyle. 3. They recognised avocados were trendy and full of healthy good fats. Based on these factors, they decided to create CADO – an avocado frozen dessert.

Because there was no product like it, they had to create a brand. And, from someone who

does lots of brand names, they did a great job. CADO, of course, is a play on the word avocado. So the brand name links to the product's key differentiator and attribute.

Once a brand name exists, then the marketing and social focusses on increasing awareness and promoting the brand name via packaging, promotion, marketing, etc. to drive sales. So in this context, a brand appears on a unique product, is used to differentiate the product from other products and is used to tell the product's story. This all makes sense, right?

Now, let's look at fresh produce. Say you are a broccoli grower. Because you are producing a whole, raw product, differentiation is much harder. But you are a smart grower - so you brainstorm ways you can differentiate yourself.

One idea is you explore 'provenance.' For example, you grow broccoli in Tasmania. Provenance differentiation means you create a brand story around being a 'cool climate' broccoli and the benefits might be bigger head size, thicker stalks and longer shelf life versus competitive broccoli not from Tasmania. If these differentiators are significant enough, then you can create and build a brand based on them.

Look at apples. The apple category has exploded with new apple varieties - why? Because everyone is trying to create differentiation to drive value growth. To do this, they have bred desirable characteristics and then branded the apple in order to market it and differentiate it from other apples. Take Pink Lady. They took the pinkish skin attribute, built that into the brand name and have built a globally successful apple brand based on brand, differentiation and investment.

The challenge for fresh produce vs CPG, is determining the value of differentiation. Take the broccoli example above. Things like bigger head and stalks are really more trade differentiators. Do consumers get excited about these traits? Likely not. This makes branding - especially a consumer brand - more difficult as the benefits don't have enough consumer value to warrant a brand.

In fruit, there seems to be more personalised engagement in the category. Perhaps this is because of ripeness and flavour and the fact fruit tends to be eaten whole and most often uncooked, but there are significantly more branding and differentiation examples in fruit vs veg.

Going back to the example of Pink Lady, the skin was the most visible differentiation but smart marketing also focussed on the effervescent taste creating multiple points of difference for the brand's foundation.

Whether you are a big or small grower, if you want to do more than be just another producer, if you want to break-out of commodity, then you have to do or grow something different. You have to find and create something that differentiates you and that has value to either trade customers, consumers or both. Then you need to brand it in order to tell your story of differentiation and ensure it stands out from competitive products.

And once you brand it, you need to fight for it. As I told the supplier in question above, "To you, this is just another fruit sticker. But to the growers I am working with, this is their brand. This is how they tell consumers they are doing something different and I will continue to send it back until you get their brand right."

Happy branding.