

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



Goodbye 2019 and hello 2020. Hard to believe another year has rolled around. As you launch into the holiday season and the new year, have you thought about what you want to achieve personally and professionally in 2020?

I have two BHAG's (big hairy audacious goals) for this coming year.

Goal 1: Complete the John Muir Trail

Some of you may know, I summit mountains. Not technical, Everest type of mountains that require ice axe and crampons. The mountains I summit just require fitness...and tenacity. I started doing summits and other 'significant hikes' when I was 25 and I have averaged a summit or a hike every other year since then. My first summit was Half Dome in Yosemite on my 25th birthday and my biggest summits have been Kilimanjaro (19,340ft/5,895m) in Tanzania and Mt Whitney (14,500ft/4,241m) in California.

One hike that has been on my bucket list for the last 10 years is the John Muir Trail. This hike is 212 miles, all backcountry, through the inner Sierra Nevada mountains. It starts at Yosemite and finishes at Mt Whitney. In total, combining ups and downs, the hike has 80,000 feet of elevation gains. It takes hikers through some of the most pristine areas of the Sierra's. Given my first two summits ever were Half Dome and Whitney, this walk brings my hiking full circle.

The permit process starts in January - approximately 5,000 applications for 400 hiking spots - so the hardest part of the hike won't be the hike...but getting a permit. I will keep you posted.

Goal 2: Launch my Virtual CMO/CSO Service

My second BHAG involves launching a Virtual CMO/CSO service for the produce industry. Over the 30 years, I have been doing marketing and strategy work in produce, it struck me

that not many companies in fresh produce can afford the big guns of a Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) or a Chief Strategy Officer (CSO). Yet today, the opportunities and challenges of being a fresh produce company are growing and the need for marketing and strategic leadership is more important than ever.

Fresh produce is trending, our industry is finally 'the cool one', yet fresh produce department volume and value sales are stagnating after four or five years of growth. What is happening?

It is a combination of factors: changing consumers (Millennials are now the largest generation by size in much of the world), changing retail/retail disruption and most importantly, changing dynamics around food and how food is consumed. The Millennial consumer is a whole new beast, eating differently, busier and more on the go and they are looking for foods that meet these needs. They have a huge array of channel options in which to buy food and one could argue the silo approach of most conventional supermarkets just does not work for the way they think or shop.

As a result, innovative produce products languish on shelves due to lack of strategy, me-too-ness or a lack of vision for alternative distribution channels. Given the challenges, changes and disruptions, the produce industry now more than ever needs great strategy and marketing. Produce companies should be thriving in the current environment. While some are, others are stagnating or spinning their wheels and I believe so much of this comes down to strategy.

As a trusted colleague recently told me, "Lisa, most CEOs don't want to take risk. They would rather put out fires than be bold, change direction or respond to disruption." While I am not a CEO, what worries me is one only has to look at how many business stalwarts are now gone because they didn't evolve (think Toys-R-Us, Blockbuster Video, etc, etc)...and I don't believe companies can run away from disruption.

One of the challenges for many companies is they would love a CMO or CSO, but affordability is an issue. Often with salaries of US\$250,000+, most produce companies can't afford these senior-level positions. My research also shows most companies don't need a full-time CMO/CSO either. Our industry is filled with smart, bright young marketers - and CEO's don't want to lose theirs on the ground teams with a C-suite marketing/strategy appointment.

Therefore a Virtual CMO/CSO makes sense. 1) Cost is spread among multiple companies. 2) A Virtual CMO/CSO works with on the ground marketing teams, focussing on strategy,

leadership, prioritizing opportunities and supporting marketing teams in implementing the strategic plan/marketing plan. 3) A Virtual CMO/CSO brings a global view to the table, playing a support role to the CEO and helping them see opportunities, risks and navigate a successful future.

CEOs have a lot on their plate. To thrive in 2020, they need to be looking ahead and while yes, they still need to put out the fires of day to day business, they must take on the challenge of their company's future. This is where I see the Virtual CMO/CSO role adding huge value - in helping a company succeed looking forward.

What are your goals for 2020? Drop me a line and let me know.

Safe and happy holidays...