

Campaign Title: Welcome to Johnsonville, Wisconsin

Brand: Johnsonville Sausage

Company(s) Involved: Johnsonville Sausage (International Business Group), Cramer-Krasselt, U-30 Group

Category: Cross-Platform

Summary

This is the story of how we made a small town in Wisconsin matter to Canadian sausage eaters.

In spite of a strong trend toward buying local, Johnsonville overcame ten years of flat sales to win over Canadian cooks and become the national share leader in sausage. We did this all without maple-leaf-washing (that thing where outside brands plaster maple leaves on their products to appear more Canadian) and without disparaging competitive brands. We did it the old-fashioned way—through a powerful insight uncovered by embedding ourselves with our target audience. The big aha: The best ingredients are sourced locally; the best recipes come from authentic sources.

Johnsonville overcame shopper nationalism by telling the unique story of a small U.S. town that sausage put on the map.

Marketing Challenge

Canadians eat almost 100 million pounds of sausage per year—an impressive amount for a country of only 36 million people (Nielsen, 2015). However, Johnsonville couldn't seem to gain traction with Canadian shoppers. After more than 10 years in the market, distribution remained limited (non-existent in Quebec), and sales were flat. Johnsonville was a perennial number 5 in market share, trailing established Canadian brands Schneider's, Maple Leaf, Pillar's and even President's Choice (a Canadian private label).

A strong "buy local" sentiment prevailed at the grocery store – particularly with commodity foods like fruits and vegetables, dairy and meats. In the mind of the Canadian shopper, buying local in these categories meant buying something that would be fresher, higher-quality and better-tasting. On top of that, buying local ingredients was good for Canada. (Source: Johnsonville custom research).

We had to make Canadians care about and buy an outsider sausage brand. What wasn't clear was how to do it. We couldn't outspend them. We couldn't denigrate their preferred brands. And we couldn't suddenly become Canadian. We needed to find a uniquely Johnsonville way to connect with Canadian shoppers.

Methodology

Even though Johnsonville had distribution in Canada for more than a decade, sales results told us that we had a long way to go toward understanding the attitudes and behaviors that were driving sausage purchases. So our multi-disciplinary team designed an approach to solve a two-part marketing problem. First, we'd use quantitative research to establish a clear definition of what we were really up against. Next, we'd use qualitative research to explore how to position the brand for success.

We started with a quantitative study geared to establish the lay of the land in the Canadian sausage market. We surveyed 600 primary grocery shoppers aged 21-64 who cook dinner 3+ times per week and who were at least open to buying sausage. Our questionnaire took a zero-based approach, setting aside our previous knowledge and assumptions: How often are people cooking, and why? Who is doing the shopping, and who is doing the preparation? What kinds of meats do respondents prefer to buy and cook, and for what occasions? How does sausage fit into that mix? What is their relative awareness of Johnsonville versus other sausage brands? Which brands do they prefer to buy, and what factors drive those preferences?

Once the data dust settled, we had an interesting revelation on our hands: We learned that Canadians were shopping for sausage in much the same way they shopped for fresh chicken, beef and pork—as a commodity ingredient. As such, their “buy local” instincts played out in full force. They'd look for a familiar local brand—ideally one that was on sale.

Next, we conducted 32 in-depth engagements, all to understand how to help Johnsonville rise above a category that's shopped like a commodity. Once again, we recruited primary shoppers and cooks; and we assigned them pre-interview journal exercises exploring meal patterns, family dynamics and emotional connections. Then we followed up with 3-hour (or more) in-home engagements in which we talked about everything food related—their attitudes about various foods, cooking habits, shopping habits, recipe finding, recipe planning and recipe sharing. We also took a trip to the store with each respondent and had them talk us through a sausage purchase.

And then we talked about recipes some more. Because consistent with our quantitative research, these were cooks who knew their way around a kitchen, and they were always on the lookout for the best, most authentic recipes from all over the planet. To find them, they immersed themselves in cooking culture, using online platforms like Facebook and YouTube as well as traditional resources such as cookbooks and food and drink publications.

Lightbulb: We needed to market more like a recipe. So, what makes a good recipe?

As our Canadian cooks told us, the very best recipes are the stuff of legend. They have a unique story behind them: Some are grounded in tradition; some come from famous cooks; some use exotic, hard-to-find or otherwise exquisite ingredients. Great authentic recipes come from special places.

Creative Execution

We told the story of Johnsonville, WI, a small US town built on 75 years of sausage heritage. And we brought that story to life in the places where Canadian cooks live, recipe hunt and shop.

The town of Johnsonville, Wisconsin has a population of just 80 people. And for generations, the town has been doing one thing—making great sausage. In 1945 the company started in the town as a family-owned butcher shop, with nothing more than a family recipe and dedication to making quality sausage. A lot has changed since then, but the family and their recipe remains.

Sausage is the still center of the universe in Johnsonville, Wisconsin. There's even an annual parade in honor of the encased meats that made the town famous. With a real story to tell, about a real town, the campaign remained authentic and true to the place where Johnsonville got its name. And it was told in the voice of the sausage craftsmen that embody the history and spirit of that town.

As an outsider brand, we needed a media approach that would help us build credibility and break into the hearts of Canadian cooks. So we looked for opportunities to insert Johnsonville into the Canadian cooking culture in a way that was natural and authentic.

A completely redesigned website gave Canadian consumers the opportunity to learn more about the town, the company and its products and to find recipe inspirations. We built mass awareness with men and women who cook and grill through national TV anchored in NHL coverage, including highly-impactful ten-second branded tune-ins. The TV spots featured real Johnsonville residents and company employees. The filming took place solely on location in the town and even the music was provided by a local Wisconsin band.

We placed print advertising in trusted Canadian food publications and put Johnsonville's unique story top of mind with highly involved consumers. We used social media posts to foster intimacy and provide recipe inspiration. In-store and event sampling let consumers get a taste of Johnsonville for themselves.

In a "don't take our word for it" approach, we partnered with a well-known celebrity Canadian Chef, Mark McEwan. As a judge on "Chopped Canada," Chef Mark was the perfect influencer to help us build a credible connection with Canadian cooks—a respected Canadian chef introducing an authentic sausage brand. Chef Mark created Canadian-centric recipe videos, featuring Johnsonville sausage, that were available on the Johnsonville Canada YouTube channel as well as the new Johnsonville.ca website. Food Network also hosted a UGC recipe

contest judged by Mark to encourage engagement with the brand—and the network cross-promoted the contest via online video and display ads. Chef Mark also took part in a PR media tour of popular morning TV shows across Canada to introduce Canadians to Johnsonville sausage in province-specific recipe demonstrations.

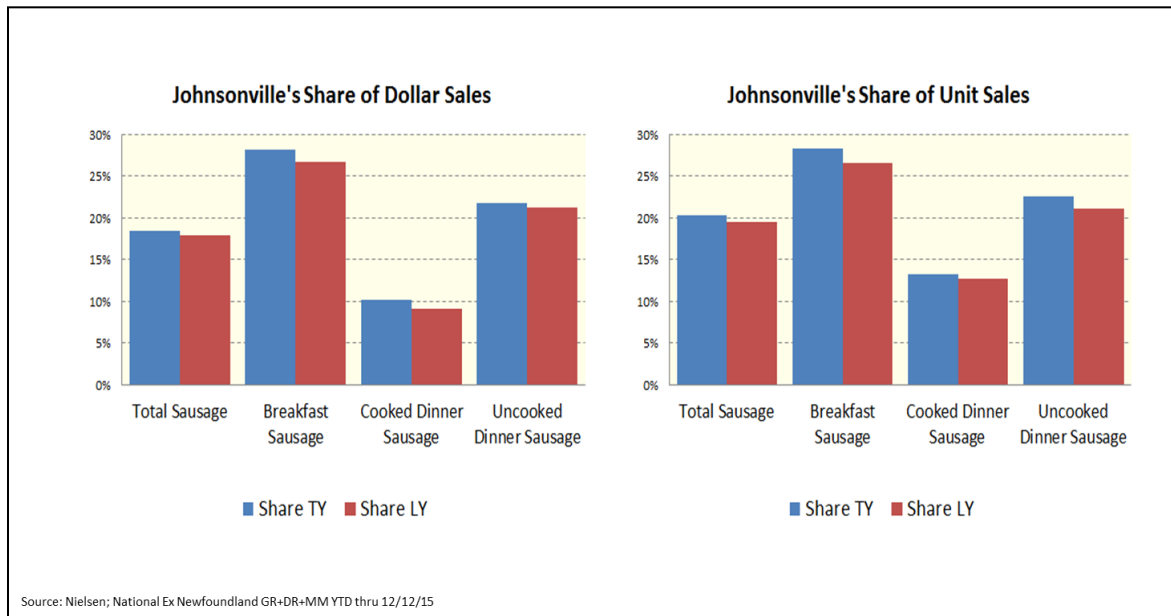
Business Results

By invoking an endearing story of a humble Wisconsin town and engaging trusted brand partners to help roll that story out, Johnsonville won the confidence of cooks and grillers and overcame more than 10 years of flat sales to grow their business in Canada.

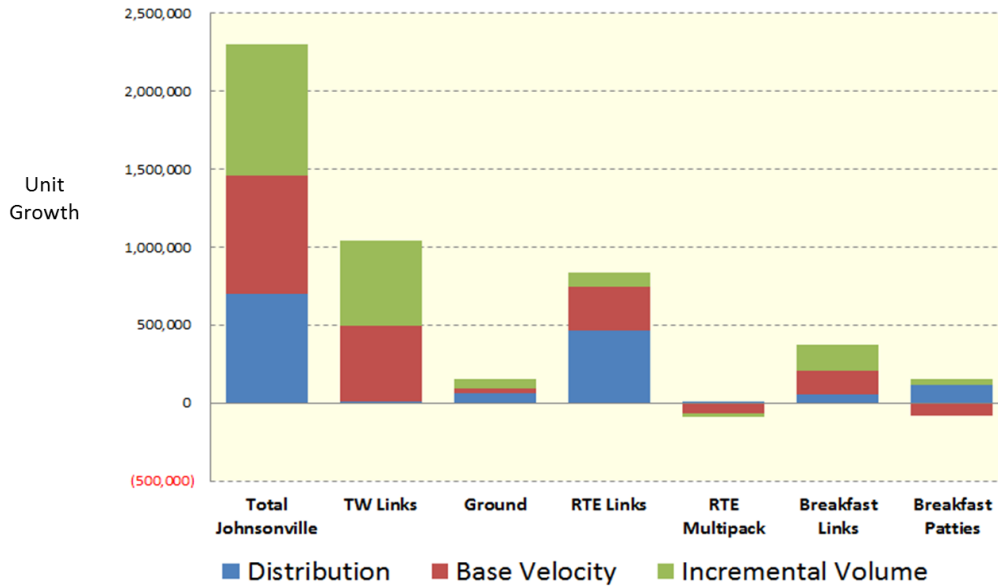
In fact, by Q1 2016, Johnsonville had jumped from the number 5 position in sausage to become the national share leader in Canada. This was fueled by a lift in both unit and dollar year-over-year sales in each of the product segments in which Johnsonville competes. (Source: Nielsen)

The business grew across all regions in both dollars (+15%) and units sold (+19%). (Source: Nielsen)

Johnsonville also gained distribution in Quebec for the very first time and achieved national distribution of ready-to-eat products in Walmart stores. (Source: Johnsonville).



33% of our unit growth is due to an increase in base velocity. The additional sales due to increased distribution can be attributed to RTE at Walmart and in Quebec.



Source: Nielsen; National Ex Newfoundland GR+DR+MM YTD thru 12/12/15