



Our media work for Wyffels Hybrids won Adweek's Media Plan of the Year award, the top recognition in the country for media strategy.

In addition, a print campaign won a national NAMA award as the best agricultural print in the nation. We've also won awards for our television work and specialty advertising for Wyffels.

Wyffels Hybrids is a regional seed corn company based out of Geneseo, Illinois.

Background

When we first started working with Wyffels Hybrids, they were pretty much known as the "High Oil Corn company". This was due to their biggest selling product, a specialty corn seed that produced grains with a higher level of oil.

Higher oil in the corn meant it was a superior product to feed some farm animals. Animals, in particular pigs, need a certain amount of supplemental fats for energy. Before the high oil corn was developed, supplemental feed fat would often be sold to the farmer from the food industry in the form of waste fat, spent oils and greases.

The benefit to feeding High Oil Corn (or HOC) was that it was a cleaner and easier way to add the supplemental fats to the animal's diet.

So farmers that were using the corn for feed were willing to pay a premium for the High Oil Corn seed, since it added additional value and benefits. Another opportunity was for cash grain farmers. Farmers who grew HOC under contract for export grain programs received a premium price for the grains they grew.

The high oil technology was developed by DuPont, which supplied the technology to various seed companies for production. Wyffels took this technology and dominated the market with quality products, support to growers to maximize their yields, and their contracting help that made selling the grains at the premium price easier for the grower.

The company grew quickly due to the success of High Oil Corn. This specialty seed soon became 50% of their business.

The situation

Like any commodity, outside influences can affect the value of a grain. As fat prices (from sources like the food industry) went down, domestic users of the High Oil Corn saw less of a benefit to pay the premium price for the corn. Introductions of GMO corns allowed for higher yields in other grains which also affected the market. Seed industry consolidation changed the availability of HOC seed stock and grain industry consolidation reduced contracting opportunities for the HOC grower.

This was the situation when the Gunter Agency started working with Wyffels Hybrids. The farming community had labelled their company as "the High Oil Corn company", and now this specialty seed that comprised half of their business was becoming an undesirable product. Wyffels' marketing director told the Gunter Agency that the rumors on the streets (or in this case, out in the fields) was that Wyffels would probably be going away or sold.

We needed to rebrand the company, build a new value proposition, and get the word out that the company was strong and had other desirable products.

Case Study: Wyffels Hybrids

Analyzing the climate in the agricultural community at the time, we knew three things:

- Wyffels was family-owned and most farming operations were also family-owned. (Even though you hear about how farms are getting bigger, they still are family operated, oftentimes where family members get together and combine forces to make a bigger operation.)
- Wyffels had a good reputation for treating people right.
- There was a change in the business landscape as many regional seed companies were bought out and consolidated with larger seed companies. This wasn't always popular with the farmer and created an opportunity for a strong, regional company to pick up market share, either by picking up the customers of these now defunct smaller companies or by positioning themselves as an alternative to the big companies. (This became a continuing theme. Over time, the bigger seed companies themselves were later bought out by bigger chemical companies, so this empathy for the smaller underdog grew.)

We knew that most farmers were never going to walk entirely away from the big seed corporations, but we also knew that it was still common to buy seed from more than one company. Years ago, a farm would plant numerous brands from a variety of sources. At this time farmers typically would only buy from two or three seed companies. If we couldn't be their top choice, we wanted to be number two. The most important thing was to be on the farm so we could increase the orders the next year.

The plan

The strategy to help Wyffels regain their stature was to quickly move them away from the HOC brand and into a new category. When you can't be the first or biggest in a category, you create your own category. We created the "alternative" category. We showcased that Wyffels had all of the important research and products like the bigger companies, but as a smaller, independently-owned company, they could react faster and give better service. Their products were as good, their service was better. (And although we didn't market the price, their pricing was slightly lower than the bigger competitors.)

One of the things we needed to do was show that the Wyffels Hybrids' seeds were on the same level as the bigger competitors. We needed to position the company in the mind of the farmer that Wyffels was a legitimate player and just as good as the largest seed companies in the world. (They were, it just wasn't necessarily in the mind of the consumer.) At the same time, we needed

to move the company away from being compared to the other regional seed companies, we would no longer play at that level. Everything we did was geared towards putting us at the same perception level as the big companies.

Whenever we presented a farm or a farmer in our ads, we made sure that it was a large farm. We showcased well-known farmers who planted 100% of Wyffels seed on over a thousand acres of corn. We showed farms where the semis were lined up to transport the grain from harvest. The idea is simple, if these big farms pick Wyffels, it's probably a safe choice for my farm too.

At the same time, we wanted to show the differences. Since owners Bill and Bob Wyffels were active in the company, we felt that featuring them in the advertising was a smart differentiator. Someone could literally call up Bill Wyffels and talk to the president of the company. This played to the values of the farmer and their perceptions of the larger corporations making disconnected decisions from ivory tower office buildings in big cities.

Along with putting Bill and Bob in the ads, we moved the company to placing larger ads in the trade pubs, putting them at the same level of their bigger competitors and positioning them away from the smaller companies. (We took them from small color ads to full page black and white ads, the cost difference wasn't really that much.) The second year we moved them into television. Subsequent years we continued the change in media strategy with larger ads and more television. The reason for television was really pretty basic—only the larger companies were advertising on TV and the media was the message: we're in the upper echelon, compare us to other companies at this level.

The results

In our first year working with Wyffels, they saw significant growth in sales. (Not bad for a company that was rumored to be going away.) The second year saw even more growth, a 25% increase in sales from the previous year. This is a remarkable number for an established company. As we continued the marketing strategy of positioning the company as a "hybrid", a company with great products and resources that rivaled the larger competitors, but still family-owned and independent, we continued to see amazing results that helped fuel expansion into new markets. In the first five years that we worked with Wyffels, they doubled in size and sales. They became the number two brand in their home state of Illinois and the largest independent corn seed company in the country.