

## Summit Insight - Trust Over Truth: How consumers seek out information on their food

How consumers take in information about the food they eat has changed drastically. What they also expect from brands from a customer service experience has evolved. This 'consumer expectation gap' was discussed by Daniel Lemin, digital marketing expert, speaker and author of 'Talk Triggers' at the recent 2018 Public Trust Summit.

Lemin, the co-founder of a digital health and food company, told summit attendees that trust matters more than truth to consumers. Research shows consumers trust less than ever before. But it's not just food producers and food manufacturers they don't trust. Consumers are skeptical of every industry.

Where do consumers seek out information when helping to make their purchasing decisions?

People are drawn to people like themselves.

As an example, people who belong to Gen Y and Z are 99% more likely to ask their friends and family for peer-to-peer recommendations for their purchasing decisions.

More importantly, 20% of all purchases made in today's retail space are made by consumers through 'word of mouth' marketing. Despite the power of technology and social media and the role they play in consumer purchasing power, most of these 'word of mouth' conversations still happen offline.

Lemin discussed how the change in food trends stem around transparency, trust, talk and technology.

When it comes to transparency, "agriculture must get out ahead of the story," said Lemin, when he referenced campaigns like McDonald's "Our Food. Your Questions," which proactively answers consumer questions.

When brands are completely open and honest, consumers can make their best choices.

Lemin also discussed how consumers' eating patterns impact the trust they have in their food system. There are 5 key archetypes that influence marketing in the food industry. Those include food allergies, religion and culture, vegetarianism, and popular diets.

This helps the agriculture industry understand each consumer type, their eating habits and how they seek out information. Lemin noted that, "consumers haven't become less trustworthy of agriculture, they just trust other people (similar to them) more."

Considering how important 'word of mouth' marketing is, there isn't a lot of strategy behind it, Lemin shared. By 2020, a majority of purchasing decisions won't be based on price, they'll be based on customer experience. Lemin discussed the idea from his book 'Talk Triggers,' how people don't want to talk about average. They want different.

The best brands are the ones that ignite the talk triggers of the 20% of word of mouth marketing by being different. He recommended agriculture be different in how it tell its story, but also in how it delivers a different customer service experience for the consumer.

## **Summit Insight - Challenging our Assumptions about the Future of Food**

Change and innovation are words agriculture and food have become accustomed too. But how rapidly change is happening has left many wondering what the future of food will look like 50, 20, even 10 years from now.

The relationship with the consumer is changing when it comes to food. The way food is grown, processed, transported and moved is changing. This evolution is sending ripple effects throughout the food chain between farmers and consumers.

The agriculture industry is challenged now more than ever to reconsider our attitudes towards science, art, and what it means to be human. We've also grown accustomed to talking about our food with opposing values.

Challenging our current assumptions in agriculture and food is what is required to build a better global food system for our very own future.

2018 Public Trust Summit Keynote speaker, Dr. Robyn Metcalfe challenged attendees in this way of thinking when she delivered a thought-provoking address, asking attendees to challenge their current assumptions and to be 'courageously curious' about the future of food.

She discussed how digital technology is adding to the rapid change within agriculture and how this intersection of food and technology is conflicting for consumers. "We want small, beautiful, slow food and at the same we want inexpensive, fast, predictable food," said Dr. Metcalfe.

"Personalization will be very important, as will localization and transparency," Dr. Metcalfe told attendees. "These are three key things that have a lot of traction. Convenience will also endlessly spar the social values in any product or service or supply chain."

If there is one thing Dr. Metcalfe made clear, it's that we're at a pivotal time in our history as a global food system.

But we've been here before with the industrialization of food in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

At that time, consumers welcomed lower food costs and the variety of food. And the quantity of it.

Industrialization brought us to a moment of reconsideration – and we're there again.

Dr. Metcalfe asked attendees to challenge their own assumptions when it came to their own roles within the food supply chain, including those of farmers, processors, packagers, distributors, consumers and of course technology and its role in the future of food.

She reminded attendees to not forget about the human element of this technological and digital transformation, one where a future in food may include robots and “lab-grown meat.”

New technologies, such as blockchain and the integration of food supply chain data, will transform our food system chain making it extremely transparent. What will the role of humans be in the future of food?

“All we know for certain is that we don't know for certain,” remarked Dr. Metcalfe.

## **Summit Insight – Tailoring our Food Conversations between Consumers and Farmers**

Consumers are interested, engaged and asking more questions about their food. Encouraging conversations to take place between farmers and consumers is where we can begin to mend the relationship that consumers want to have with the people who grow, produce and make their food.

What could be done to mend this relationship with consumers? Communicate differently and do so with the right language and tools, tailored to how consumers want their information.

These ideas and more were discussed by the ‘Changing the Conversations about Food’ panel at the 2018 Public Trust Summit. The panel featured three food experts who provided valuable insights on how this different approach to communicating could help the agriculture industry better connect with consumers.

The insights of Montreal-based food writer, Mayssam Samaha, ‘Before the Plate’ documentary producer, Dylan Sher and registered dietician and food blogger Dara Gurau were unique perspectives for the audience to hear from, as all three panelists didn't come from a farm yet all worked in the food value chain.

A lot of the miscommunication about agriculture was credited by panelists to the fact that the farmer and consumer are too far removed from each other along the value chain to have productive conversations. Having farmers tell their own personal stories to consumers directly is the best way of

communicating but if they can't, having trustworthy professionals who can relate to consumers, is also valuable storytelling.

Of the 10,000 dietitians in Canada, Dara Gurau shared that as a Registered Dietician herself, "understanding the science behind food is what helps me to educate my patients as a clinician in a hospital and my community as a food nutrition communicator."

Dara does this by sharing live videos and recipes on Facebook through her "How to Eat" channel, to promote Canadian agriculture, educate her audience on farming practices and dispel myths on farming.

Montreal-based food and travel writer, Mayssam Samaha has visited farms in Canada and Europe but doesn't know about day-to-day farming practices. Everything she learns and does through her "Will Travel for Food" blog, writing, dinner series and Jean-Talon Market tours, is done to learn and bring more trust to consumers and connect them to the rest of the food chain. She promotes conversation between consumers and farmers, encouraging them to ask questions, voice their concerns and have the conversations to 'humanize the farm.'

Recently graduating from agriculture at the University of Guelph, panelist Dylan Sher said he was 'inspired' by his time at the University, and it was this inspiration that motivated him to film the 'Behind the Plate' documentary.

Dylan shared from his experiences that consumers see 'farmers' as the face of agriculture, that is why campaigns like 'farm to plate' and 'farm raised' resonate. He encouraged the industry to come together and unite to market the 'farmer' perspective to consumers, which in turn, will help to promote agriculture as an industry.

What else can the agriculture industry do to further its communications efforts? Mayssam suggested reaching out to journalists, local writers or bloggers who are always asking questions, looking to have these conversations about their food and looking for content. "We want to communicate but we aren't hearing from agriculture," said Mayssam.

Dara shared that because Canadians are so far removed from agriculture, they want access to reliable and legitimate sources as they look for information but because they can't find it, they turn to others, who may not be experts, who have opinions on food. She said these 'scare tactic' opinions that are used by some people, work because they appeal to people's emotions.

While people can be very loud with their opposing views, "We shouldn't be louder, we should tell our stories better" says Dara.

## Summit Insight – Top Five Takeaways from the 2018 Public Trust Research

Understanding the relationship Canadian consumers have with their food and how consumers trust, is a fascinating one.

The 2018 Public Trust Research includes leading-edge research with insights into Canadians' beliefs and values around food information. This research is important because it tracks public attitudes about Canadian food, agriculture and food system issues and provides insight into what makes food information credible.

Canadians want balanced, credible information about food so they can feel confident in their purchasing decisions. With this research, the entire food chain has to increase its efforts in openly sharing information about food and how it's produced, processed and packaged because consumers are asking for more information now more than ever.

**Here are the top five takeaways within the 2018 research:**

- 1) **Access to Healthy, Affordable Food** - Cost of food is still the top overall concern in a long list of life concerns and topics for Canadians. For the third year in a row, the rising cost of food is the top-rated life concern. Keeping healthy food affordable maintains as the second most important issue. Only 17% of Canadians agree that Canadian food is amongst the most affordable in the world today, even though that is factually correct.
- 2) **Direction of the Food System** - This year, there was a significant decrease in several key measures when it comes to public trust in the food system. Only a third (36%) of Canadians think the food system is headed in the right direction compared to four in ten last year (43%). Along with this decrease, the proportion who feel the food system is on the wrong track increased a significant 9 points and is back to 2016 levels (23%). Although over half have a positive view of Canadian agriculture (55%), this is down significantly compared to 2016 (61%) dropping for the first time since 2006.
- 3) **Shared Values in Earning Public Trust** - Shared values are 3-5 times more powerful than facts when it comes to earning trust. CCFI used digital ethnography to observe consumers online across many social channels, providing detailed insights into how – and where – to engage the right audiences to earn trust. There were five values-based archetypes identify that are key to understanding to help earn public trust when it comes to food.
- 4) **Opportunities with Shared Values** - The 'Investigator' archetype is an important segment to understand and connect with. With their influence through to Institutionalists and Followers, they represent a significant percent of the population and pathway to reach those who may not be tuned into your existing channels. There's an opportunity to engage them through new types of "social institutions."



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- 5) **Turn up the Transparency** - The report card on transparency is in the 'needs improvement' category for the entire sector, including key players such as academia and government. While there are many great efforts to share information openly with the public from individuals, companies and organizations across the supply chain – the average Canadian isn't seeing or hearing it just yet. Public trust is a fundamental base that is needed for the future growth and success of the food system.

To read the full-length version of the 2018 Public Trust Insights to Action report, [click here](#).