

Washington Potatoes in the Spotlight PR

Situation/Research/Planning

The Washington State Potato Commission (WSPC) is an association of 250 potato farmers in Washington state. The Commission is funded by an assessment on all potatoes grown in the state (that's how members join, it is not optional). WSPC's annual operating budget of approximately \$3.825 million is approved and allocated by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA). The primary functions of the Commission are to enhance trade opportunities, advance environmentally sound production and cultural practices by funding research that addresses issues such as disease and insect pressures, and represent growers' interests on trade and legislative issues.

For the fourth year in a row, What's Your Avocado? was charged with creating a printed eight-page Annual Report for the WSPC that serves as a snapshot of the Commission's activities in the prior fiscal year. The goal of the publication is to explain to potato farmers how their assessment funds are being used: to show the benefits they're getting through research, government affairs, and marketing activities, and to promote buy-in among members that the assessment is worthwhile. Additionally, the publication is used to demonstrate the Commission's deliverables to Washington state government officials who approve the funding allocation each year.

We worked with WSPC's marketing director, Brandy Tucker, and staff to gather reports on the Commission's activities, financials, and statistics that would be of interest to members and tell the Commission's potato advocacy story. Because of our history of working with the Commission, we were aware that two Commission-funded projects (a TV show and a Documentary film) had been nominated for two Emmy awards in the past year. We thought, "Why not focus on that?" As the report literally puts Washington Potatoes in the Spotlight, why not do just that? Take the Emmy theme to the max and walk a potato down a red carpet in the spotlight? It would require a pitch, not just to the marketing director, but to the Board of Directors, comprised of farmers who tend to be conservative in their approach to marketing and storytelling. We hoped they'd be willing to take a risk on a whimsical approach. We verbally pitched to WSPC's marketing director, who laughed so hard and then nearly screamed "Yes!" To get the Board to approve, we created a mock-up of the cover and financials, and Ms. Tucker presented them at WSPC's third-quarter meeting. The farmers loved it. We got the "green light" and a Spud Star Was Born.

Implementation/Execution

The Concept: Washington Potatoes in the Spotlight — A Hollywood Approach. The mock-ups showed the cover: a potato walking down the red carpet, and the financials: potatoes sitting in theater seats, scaled to correspond with the largest and smallest dollar figures of the budget.

The Execution: With the approval of the concept, and after editing the content, we flowed the text onto eight pages, as we had done in previous years. It was quickly apparent that no amount of editing could keep the book to eight pages, especially if we wanted to fully explore the Hollywood theme. The proposed budget for project management, editing, and design was \$4,500. When the client agreed to expand from eight to 12 pages, the design budget increased by \$825, bringing the final cost of the project, (not including printing & postage) to \$5,325.

With the room to fully explore the concept, we captured the style of Hollywood's Golden Age of red carpets and Art Deco glamour, and turned that spotlight on Washington Potatoes. Touches such as committee member's names inside gold foil icons shaped like the state of Washington, and trophy imagery coupled with potato-themed photos from last year, gave the piece flavor and relevance. The project began with an email from us to the client at the end of June 2018. We delivered the final, high-resolution PDF for print at the end of September. It went to print and was mailed in early October.

Evaluation/Effectiveness

As the project was a print-only piece, there are no web or social metrics to report. However, we feel the most important metrics are the ones the client uses to measure the success of the project: grower response. In the weeks after mailing, Commission staff received more than a half-dozen phone calls from specific grower members who rarely, if ever, interact with the organization. Historically, these members simply fill out their acreage reports and pay their assessment fees. Our client was ecstatic that calls from generally inactive members were made to specifically to thank the Commission for creating the report and sharing the information. That NEVER happens! The Board of Directors and various committee members echoed similar reactions: chatter at the coffee shops where farmers gather, positive reactions to the publication, and remarks on its value. Our client said these types of results held real value to the Commission and showed that a report of this type helped showcase to members the value of the assessment they pay on their crops.

Brandy Tucker, WSPC Marketing Director, offers this testimonial: "In the past, we did Annual Reports that were full of long reports and numbers that were just plain boring, with no feedback from our growers. We stopped sending them out, saving money on paper, binding and postage. We began sending out Annual Reports again three years ago when we were introduced to What's Your Avocado?. They had multiple great ideas for how to get our information to our growers in just a few short articles, pages, and images! This year's 2017-2018 Annual Report, I believe was the best one ever! We did many things for the community this past year that our Commissioners know about, but that group is 15 out of 250 growers. For the rest of the growers, the Annual Report is the best way for them to see where their assessment money is going. It's very powerful especially for research information, with over \$1M in grower money being used to fund research projects. These new Annual Reports are akin to social media posts where they can see what WSPC is doing, talk to their fellow growers, and call the Commission to ask questions or share their gratitude for what we do to promote their livelihood."

For the two previous years that we prepared the report, our budget for editing and design was held to \$3,250. When we were contracted this year, we lobbied for an increase in budget to \$4,500, which was granted. With the expansion to 12 pages, the budget increased again to \$5,325. Based on the performance of the Annual Reports we have developed over the past three years, and with the innovative concept we proposed for this year, our client was happy to approve a 64% increase in our budget over the previous year. We believe that's a telling metric that shows the value the client sees in our work and in the project overall.