



Legacy & Leadership

Andrea Neu has had a long career focused on the dairy industry's production and marketing of dairy foods.

Her family's legacy began in 1884 and was built upon Wisconsin dairy. In 1974 — with the completion of her degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Ag Journalism School, focusing on food science and marketing — the door was opened to promote Wisconsin dairy products through an internship with the American Dairy Association (ADA) of Wisconsin, the ideal job she was seeking to promote dairy. Neu remained with ADA-Wisconsin until 1978 as the local market consumer information manager for all dairy products and Wisconsin Cheese Festivals national media representative for Wisconsin cheese.

In 1979 Andrea launched her "Consumer Medium" consulting business, working with many Wisconsin consumer products and dairy food clients (i.e. Saco Foods, an innovative powdered buttermilk). Consumer research and communication was her focus from 1979-1983. A major client, the Copps Corp. — a family-owned Wisconsin food retailer and wholesaler — offered a consulting opportunity and career challenge as a participant in U.S. food distribution systems at a time when there were significant changes in the U.S. food retailer business sector. Consumers questioned retailers' change over to product scanning, UPC codes, and the accuracy of required cost-per-unit shelf labels and packaged product label information as well as Nutrition Facts and ingredient statements. Neu also was designated on behalf of Copps as its consumer advocate on the new U.S. Consumer Affairs Department board, joining forces with 15-20 other supermarket consumer affairs and Food Marketing Institute reps. This resulted in Copps' consumer focus group and market research.

In 1982 Neu was recruited back into ADA as manager of advertising and promotion in anticipation of the proposed Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB) Order that was finally approved in 1983.

WMMB was formed in 1984, with Neu's transfer to the new organization, followed by several other ADA staff. She planned and executed integrated marketing communication programs, serving as vice president of marketing services and corporate communication until semi-retirement in 2001. During that time Neu collaborated with many Wisconsin dairy organizations and served on The International Dairy Deli Bakery Association (IDDBA) board of directors for eight years. She was IDDBA president in 1992.

In 2002 Neu launched "Image Maker," a marketing consultant service working with the Dairy Business Innovation Center (DBIC), a federally funded grant program organized by Dan Carter. Neu served as a brand development and marketing specialist with more than 100 DBIC clients until the grant project expired in 2009. She continued to consult with dairy and local food clients until 2018 and still is contributing to ongoing projects with One-Plus-One Design clients.

Q What did you particularly enjoy about working for an association/marketing board? What are some key differences versus working for a for-profit company?

A Working with nonprofit associations and marketing boards is an ongoing challenge, and also an incredible opportunity for marketing professionals to achieve and meet the expectations and goals of the many members and funders of these organizations. The members invest in these organizations to improve and enhance their businesses (and in some cases, their lives), as well as being supporters and advocates for the services and programs created by the associations. Being a leader and/or member of a professional team that strives to exceed their organization's mission and goals results in a very rewarding career. It is not related to making money from selling products, but it is focused on providing valuable services that will help make the marketplace a better place to work or our environment a better place to live in.

Q How do associations/marketing boards make a difference for the industry as a whole?

A Marketing boards, formed on federal and state laws, must focus on their specific food category/commodity (i.e. dairy as defined

by FDA Standards of Identity). They have the responsibility to create a foundation that will serve as their marketing platform to build and expand the reputation, credibility and standards of the products that emerge from the natural commodity produced. Communication specialists create accurate and memorable key messages and graphics based on the organization's strategic platform to represent the end-products' unique and valuable qualities and characteristics. This establishes collaborative and cost-effective marketing programs and integrated communication services that can be leveraged by the industry.

Q What advice would you give someone going into a leadership position for the first time?

A An effective leader must earn the respect of its team/staff by inspiring and offering them the flexibility and support to create and successfully execute the organization's business plans. Consistent and sincere recognition of your team members' accomplishments and their progress to meet the organization's goals will be a valued reward for both the leader and team members.

Q What is one characteristic that you believe every leader should possess?

A Veracity supported with understanding and commitment to the organization's core values and mission.

Q Please comment on the importance of accuracy, product quality and reputation to the longevity of a business.

A The image and reputation of a company/business is the foundation for brand development and long-term success. The relationships a company establishes as a food production and marketing entity require huge investments in time, energy and money, and are built on consistent delivery of exceptional quality products and services for the buyers and the end users. Over time, these relationships are strengthened because of the expectations the company has continually established with product performance and the confidence in services that customers gain because of their business standards stemming from the organization's core values.

Every business develops a reputation, whether they actively and knowingly strive to establish that image, or just randomly work within a marketplace and allow that reputation to develop on its own... good, bad or otherwise!

Q How do you encourage creative thinking within your organization?

A The key is to hire and mentor staff members who are talented, passionate, dedicated and understand all of the sectors within the dairy industry that are necessary to produce, market and profit from the broad spectrum of dairy products. Innovation and creative thinking extends from the ability to contribute their talents within the team to achieve the business's success and build its reputation.

Q What has been your favorite thing about working in the industry?

A My family's legacy is built around Wisconsin dairy — farmers, cheesemakers, ice cream entrepreneurs — those hard-working, passionate and proud people from past and present generations who have devoted their lives and livelihood to dairy. My career in marketing these incredible food products, especially Wisconsin cheese, to help feed America (and the world) has been an honor, challenge and a blessing.

Q Please tell us about a favorite product or marketing campaign you led. What made it special?

A The "Wisconsin Belle," a 40,060-pound block of Wisconsin Cheddar, made history as the "Guinness Book of World Records" Largest Cheese when created on March 14, 1988, in Little Chute, Wisconsin, at Simon's Specialty Cheese. The "Belle" was a collaborative marketing program (March 1, 1988-June 15, 1989) commissioned by the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association and the Fleming Cos.

During "Belle's" 15-month nationwide tour, traveling in a custom-designed "Cheese Mobile" — a refrigerated semi-trailer with six display windows — the traveling billboard that attracted nationwide attention and extensive publicity for Wisconsin Cheese significantly increased the state's cheese sales wherever "Belle" was exhibited. The trade publications proclaimed the Wisconsin Cheese campaign as the "world's longest and most successful cheese promotion." The tour involved promotions in 22 states, including Wisconsin specialty cheese merchandising, also featuring "Baby Belle" Cheddar mammoths, at 230 Fleming/Godfrey supermarkets and eight major events/trade shows, including the finale at the 1989 IDDBA Expo.

Q Please discuss the benefits of collaboration versus the need to "protect your brand."

A I believe collaboration is the primary reason why Wisconsin has built and maintained its reputation and title as "America's Dairyland." The dairy-related associations, organizations and services that have formed and thrived in Wisconsin during the past six decades have worked together to ensure and support the economic growth, innovation, quality assurance programs, expertise and the worldwide reputation of the state's dairy industry. Collaboration has made a difference!

Q How is the coronavirus pandemic affecting marketing for dairy?

A In Wisconsin media the current message focuses on the importance of our dairy farmers and their necessary role in America's supply chain to ensure safe, healthy foods extending from their quality milk. They are celebrated as dedicated workers who will continue to be on the frontline for consumers — an important reminder for Americans.

This health and economic crisis is a perfect opportunity for national consumer advertising to focus on the importance of real milk and its nutritional value. Revive the slogan, "Milk... It Does a Body Good!" Milk not only tastes great, it also is an affordable good/excellent source of nine essential nutrients that help to support healthy immune functions.

At this time in history it is a critical key message to deliver via all formats of media to America's consumers! CMN