

Marketing Alaskan Seafood:
Strategies with Brand Identification, Differentiation and Promotions

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ABSTRACT

Everyday the globe experiences changes with food. New methods in growing and harvesting are becoming approved, while others are frowned upon. People care more about where their food comes from than ever before. This research is to explore how Alaska seafood can successfully market their products in an ever-changing world. As challenges present themselves in the industry, opportunities are there as well.

This study sets out to explore marketing strategies for promoting a seafood brand. Through exploring current literature and interviewing experts to obtain data, conclusions will be drawn and analyzed. These findings will help to understand the best practices in promoting Alaska's seafood brand.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of Problem

This study focuses on aspects of marketing an Alaskan seafood brand through various strategies and implementation efforts. It will take a close look at brand differentiation in the marketplace as well as promotion and brand identity tactics. The Stanleys discuss how a brand should be an experience. “Food tourism in most regions of the world has been and needs to be integrated into traditional tourism activities” (Stanley 2014).

There are always challenges in the marketplace, a few being of course other competitors in the global seafood industry, as well as the marketing methods of other meat products like beef and chicken. Sustainability questions and standards arise as farmed salmon becomes popular in some parts of the world. As some people drive towards plant-based diets, that is sure to have an effect on the industry. It is also interesting to note the utilization of the product and marketing of its by and co-products. Even perceptions and descriptors of seafood such as ‘fresh’, ‘wild’, and ‘farmed’ have an effect on the branding of a product. Marketing a brand is always a challenge, but it is welcomed with the knowledge of exciting implementation strategies.

Background of Problem

There is not a lot of existing literature pertaining to specifically marketing seafood. However, there is a substantial amount of research regarding seafood

health and education, as well as an extensive amount of materials on marketing and branding tactics. Alaska seafood is a product that should be marketed in the most efficient manner possible as a way to ensure that the industry and publics are both educated and content with the brand.

Purpose of Study

By investigating the marketing of seafood, organizations are able to get a better idea of how to relate their products to their publics, and ensure they are educated about the process. This research is to assist the seafood industry in better marketing their products to ensure satisfied consumers for years to come. The lifestyle, culture, and branding of Alaska fisheries will be promoted through various tactics.

Setting for Study

This study will be done as a part of the data collection for a Senior Project at California Polytechnic University in San Luis Obispo. Interviews will be with residents of Alaska who are involved in the seafood industry from start to finish, as well as some local branding expertise from a company in San Luis Obispo and a dietician from Arizona. The questionnaires will be tailored to the expertise of each individual.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed for the study to be used as a way to gain more knowledge in the field and industry. There were some gaps in the

existing literature, and these questions serve the purpose of researching further into these gaps.

1. How does one differentiate their brand?
2. What promotion methods can be used?
3. How does an organization build a stronger brand identity?
4. What education and behavior-influencing methods can be implemented?
5. How do perceptions impact consumer's buying choices and what challenges is the industry facing?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to clarify several of the subjects on the topic and assist the reader and provide context to the study.

Brand: a name, term, sign, symbol, or design or combination of them intended to identify the goods or services and differentiate them from competitors (Kahle & Kim, 2006).

Brand Differentiation: what it is about a company, brand, product, or service that makes it unique or more desirable than competitors. Differentiation is an important part of branding, and the differentiation strategy should consider how the brand is positioned compared to competitors (Neubert, 2012).

Brand Identity: the company logo and any associated type and graphics, and the consistent manner in which they are visually used to represent the brand, on stationery, marketing materials, packaging, website, signage, etc (Neubert, 2012).

Farmed Fish: involves raising fish commercially in tanks or enclosures, usually for food (Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 2015).

Gillnetting : gillnetting is a common fishing method used by commercial and artisanal fishermen of all the oceans and in some freshwater and estuary areas. (Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 2015).

Source Credibility Theory: suggests that the major factor in whether or not a message is believed is the credibility of its source, whether a person or organization (Bobbitt, & Sullivan 2013).

Subsistence Fishing: refers to fishing, other than sport fishing, that is carried out primarily to feed the family and relatives of the person doing the fishing. Generally it also implies the use of low tech “artisanal” fishing techniques (Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 2015).

Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory: information passes from the source to the opinion leaders and then on to the receivers (Bobbitt, & Sullivan 2013).

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 holds the background of the problem, purpose of the study, and a definition of terms. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature of the topic. Chapter 3 will present the methodology of the study. In Chapter 4, ideas and findings will be organized based on the original research topics. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study as well as recommendations for organizations and industries marketing Alaskan seafood.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The review of existing literature pertains to marketing strategies through differentiation, geography, and education of health benefits to assist the seafood marketing industry in better gauging how to promote their brand.

Brand Differentiation

When differentiating a brand, an important sector that literature suggests is where you are in relation to your publics. Geography and physical location is not only relevant, but entirely instrumental in improving performance of marketing communications (Houldsworth, 2003). They add that by telling where their customers are, they can begin to tell *who* they are. Other articles discuss making your product the hero, and focusing more on your product rather than the promotion (Ellman, 2015). This way, you'll turn your promotions into opportunities to develop your brand even further. When promoting your product, they say the most important tactic is to use timing to your benefit, for example; emailing a recipe during a particular season where it provides to be useful.

Social marketing combines the best elements of the traditional approaches to social change in an integrated planning and action framework, and utilizes advances in communication technology and marketing skills (Hershfield & Mintz, 2015). It uses marketing techniques to generate discussion among publics, promote information to audiences, and allow them to question their attitudes, values, and behaviors. By doing so, it helps to create a climate conducive in social and

behavioral change. Execution of understanding the 4Ps: Price, Place, Promotion, and Product can help differentiate your brand from others in the marketplace.

Another way of differentiation is separating yourself from other organizations in unique and un-precedented ways. The brands that stand out from their competition are those who understand that strategic branding goes deeper than visuals (Shepard, 2014). Understanding your brand through internal beliefs and communications, understanding your best potential audiences and understanding and differentiating from other products are three things that make this happen.

A company that does this well is *Airstream*. These are the most recognized RVs on the road, have an iconic image, and a massive audience following them that embraces the “retro side of life” (Shepard, 2014). They focus on quality, image, and community. The product is expensive but it doesn’t lose value. They recently re-launched their new website and digital experience, where they encourage you to be a part of the community. They host community events where you can experience what they are all about for yourself. Companies like this share ideas and generate meaningful content that is not boastful. Another one is Whole Foods who uses bright, unique, and cheerful designs that are easy to understand. By partnering with Top Chef to promote their food, they often host events, run blogs and even have an app.

Promotion Methods

One aspect of promoting a brand or product is giving your publics some background on the subject. This is done in several ways, one of which is storytelling.

By showing, and not just telling, you can further promote your brand. Storytelling is a valuable tool in social marketing – one that enables you to illustrate the behavioral changes you’re striving to create as opposed to simply telling people what they should do (Beakey 2014). With the problem of bullying, which they knew not just a simple PSA would fix, they instead used serial dramas that were suspenseful stories with interesting characters to capture the attention of target audiences.

Another way to give publics background in a subject besides storytelling, is allowing them to discover how product came to be through their regulations. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game, for example, regulates Alaskan fisheries to ensure they remain sustainable for many years of future use.

“Because of the magnitude of commercial fisheries for salmon, state biologists collect extensive information and statistics for management decisions. Alaska also has very important sport and subsistence fisheries for salmon. Many Alaskans depend heavily on subsistence-caught salmon for food and cultural purposes. Fishery management plans give top priority to the subsistence use of fish resources” (Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 2015).

Using the digital opportunities out there now can really enhance a consumer’s experience with the brand. How-to videos for recipes, how salmon is caught, and more, could all be used through digital marketing. This article stresses to ensure that promotions are actually building your brand, and not damaging them in the long term. Think of ways that your brand can add value, and will appeal to

their emotions (Peck, 2015). They also stress that creating useful content to reach new behavioral segments is important, rather than blatant advertising. Stay ahead of conversations and provide news or updates on your products that your followers may find valuable. An extremely essential part of promotions is that the brand's organization should pay attention to seasons and know when to highlight special products. Education about different uses for your product is also vital.

Pike Place Market promotes their products through their enhanced website options. When one first glances at their site, they are welcomed with three options: 'Buy fresh seafood online,' 'World Famous gear', or 'have some fun'. They have flowing images that make you want to head down to the fish market and marvel at all of the new options. 'Meet Our Mongers' is also an available website option so you can really see who is involved with your fish. 'Recipes' are also an important highlight. They even have a live camera at the market which you can view from the website. This is a completely transparent way of promoting their incredible product- and experience, Pike Place Market.

The Stanleys, in their literature, believe food should be not just a tourism product but also an experience. Their book explains the nature, development, management, and marketing of food. Food can be part of a cultural experience, they say. "Food tourism in most regions of the world has been and needs to be integrated into traditional tourism activities, although in some regions, for example France and Italy, it is becoming the main reason to visit the destination" (Stanley, 2014).

Building Stronger Brand Identity

Knowing that your seafood is from Alaska should invoke a strong feeling within the consumer. Hearing personal and cultural benefits about the fishing community can help publics positively associate information with the brand. Begala discussed how salmon has positively impacted his family's well being, culture, and health.

“And it's an even greater thrill for me as a father to see my eldest son guide his old man and his little brother into a honey hole full of salmon on a remote Alaskan river. For three generations my family has come to Alaska to chase wild salmon. The Chinook, the Sockeye, the Coho, the Chum and the Humpy are graceful, powerful beauties with an unerring GPS for home. They're also tasty -- and among the healthiest sources of protein you can find. Wild salmon, the ultimate free-range meat is high in healthful Omega 3 fatty acids, and has been found to prevent heart disease and diabetes in Native Alaskans -- even those who are obese. No wonder First Alaskans have been happily harvesting salmon for at least 40 centuries” (Begala, 2013).

“The techniques of branding used well by the globe's leading companies have tactics that can be implemented by regular organizations and institutions” (Temporal, 2014). Temporal's work discusses branding and the range of strategies and techniques that can be used to create powerful identities. An organization must have a powerful brand strategy. They focus on what is happening in practice and what is and isn't working in their branding efforts.

Education and Behavior-Influencing Methods

When we consider peoples' opinions on seafood in general, and their beliefs about wild versus farmed salmon, it is often concluded that people are uneducated about their purchasing decisions. Many consumers believe they are consuming wild salmon, when in reality it is farmed. It is important that consumers are educated about the product to develop a lasting relationship with them.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium took things a step further when they developed a handy pocket guide providing information to shoppers and diners. The guide educates consumers on the impact they are making with each purchase (Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2015).

The article discusses the different types of seafood one should eat based on their certifications. In evaluating the seafood types, there are many different people and levels involved when deciding how sustainable a type of seafood is. At the very least, they update the information every three years.

If a fishery devises a better plan to sustain their harvests, that is taken into account. A "red fish" (least sustainable option), can definitely work its way up to a "green fish" (best option) with stricter regulations and a sustainable future. Unfortunately, Monterey Bay doesn't believe any seafood market is completely immune to seafood fraud and illegal fishing, but their goal is for consumers to simply be educated.

Jennifer Dianto Kemmerly is the executive director of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch, the country's leading program for sustainable seafood. She says she wants people to just ask. "But this is why Seafood Watch also assesses

farm-raised seafood. We really want people to eat seafood—it’s a healthy option—and if you take the wild caught supply and couple that with sustainably harvested or farm raised seafood, you *can* feed the world. We just have to make sure that we don’t develop farm-raised seafood in a manner that has other environmental impacts,” Kemmerly said.

Perceptions and Challenges

Seafood is a healthy alternative to many other meat products, but as some people are moving towards a plant-based diet, or are worried about the labeling laws for salmon, there are many perceptions of health and diet in seafood.

There are many different health benefits of consuming salmon, particularly that of Alaska’s. They elaborate on recent studies that conclude salmon contains small bioactive protein molecules that provide special support for joint cartilage and control of the inflammation of the digestive tract (Larson, 2015).

Furthermore, the article discusses the importance of omega 3s and how about 4 ounces of baked or broiled salmon contains at least 2 grams of omega-3 fats, which is more than the average U.S. adult gets from all their food intake over the course of several days. Intake of fish rich in omega-3 fat is associated with a decreased risk of numerous cardiovascular problems, as well as increased mood and cognition.

A low-risk category of contaminated fish (mercury, pesticides, organic pollutant, etc.) are the wild-caught Alaska salmon. They have been found the lowest

risk category of wild-caught salmon for regular consumption. “Monterey Bay Aquarium has recently determined Alaska salmon to be the only low-risk salmon in terms of four sustainability criteria: the inherent vulnerability of the fish, the effects of fishing on the overall habitat, the status of wild stocks, and the nature of the by-catch” (Larson 2015).

Many advocates of sustainable food argue that Farmed salmon creates an unnatural habitat for fish and is likely to compromise fish quality. They recommend Alaskan wild-caught salmon even over certified organic, farm-raised salmon.

A study conducted by the National Institutes of Health showed that “In a study of more than 1,000 people (average age 75), those with higher blood levels of an omega-3 called DHA were more than 40% less likely to develop dementia (including Alzheimer's) over the next nine years than people with low DHA levels. ...Experts advise eating a weekly serving of fish rich in omega-3's" (Smoky bay Fisheries, 2009).

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter presents the various methods implemented to obtain data for the study including the data sources, design of data presentation, as well as limitations and delimitations. Interviews were the primary means of data collection.

Data Sources

For this study, experts were reached in the fields of the fishing industry; communications, branding, and marketing; and diet. Each questionnaire was developed to specifically address the original research questions regarding the management of a brand in Alaska seafood.

Participants

Bill Thomas is a former Alaska state representative and southeast Alaska fisherman. He is responsible for recently doubling Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute's budget. The communications expert selected was Tyson Fick, Communications Director at Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI). The executive director of ASMI, Alexa Tonkovich, was interviewed as well about international relations. The consumer chosen was Lea Ann Holzmeister who is a dietician in Phoenix, Arizona. The seafood distributor interviewed was Harry Rietz of southeast Alaska. Mary Verdin owns Verdin, a branding and marketing firm in San Luis Obispo, California.

Interview Design

Because marketing Alaska seafood involves many different players and roles, each interviewee was presented with questions unique to his or her own expertise.

William “Bill” Thomas, Former Alaska State Representative:

1. Why do you feel it was necessary to double ASMI's budget?
2. Do you see that budget increasing in the future? Do you think it will continue to increase or does that depend on the trends?
3. What do you feel differentiates Alaska from other seafood industries?
4. As for other reasons Alaska is differentiated, why do you think consumers would desire Alaska seafood over other types?
5. What are some of the biggest challenges you see right now in marketing Alaska seafood?
6. What do you feel are some of the most important consumers or publics to bring in or get attention from that we don't have right now?
7. As far as consumers go, the people that buy Alaska seafood, what do you think their perceptions are about it? Especially those people that aren't from Alaska, what are they thinking when they buy Alaska seafood?
8. How does culture, family fishing, etc. help Alaska? Do you think it is important for consumers to know how their food came to them? How does Alaska do this? Is it important to show this in the marketing?
9. How is Alaska seafood utilizing the product as far as marketing by-products and co-products?

Harry Rietz, Owner of Haines Packing Co in Haines, Alaska:

1. Who is your primary consumer?
2. What promotional methods do you use?
3. How do you differentiate your product or brand from others?
4. What facts/stories do you tell to differentiate your product?
5. Why do you think people enjoy seafood, particularly that of Alaska's?
6. What are some of your biggest challenges as a company? Who are your competitors?
7. Do you feel like the culture and beauty of the area is helpful in marketing your product?
8. What perceptions and misconceptions do you run into with consumers?

Tyson Fick, Communications Director at Alaska Seafood Marketing

Institute;

1. What are some strategies you use in differentiating your brand from other seafood brands? How does Alaska culture, fishery methods, and beauty of the area play a role? Specifically, how do you market the native culture part?
2. What promotional methods do you use? What previous tactics did you utilize that you have eliminated? What recent ones have you implemented?
3. Is there anything you have tried that hasn't worked in the past? Maybe you realized your time was better spent elsewhere?
4. Why do you think people enjoy seafood, particularly that of Alaska's?
5. What misconceptions do you run into with consumers?

6. What are some of your biggest challenges right now? How about the future?
What are some big challenges ASMI has overcome?
7. In regards to challenges, we see many people are driving towards a plant-based diet. How will this affect ASMI?
8. What are ways that you are currently strengthening your brand identity?
What are you looking to do in the future?

Lea Ann Holzmeister, Dietician and seafood consumer, Phoenix Arizona:

1. You are a dietician, what do you recommend to your clients about seafood?
2. Describe your seafood diet.
3. Where do you purchase seafood? (Stores, restaurants, etc.)
4. When you are in a restaurant, how often do you buy seafood?
5. How often do you check where it is from? How important is that to you?
6. How often do you choose salmon over other meat options such as beef or chicken?
7. Are our friends and coworkers similar in their dietary habits?
8. What do you think makes a specific seafood brand desirable? Is there anything you see that makes you choose one over the other?
9. Can you tell me about your article?
10. How does seafood impact pregnancy?

Alexa Tonkovich, Executive Director at Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute:

1. Can you tell me about your role, and previous roles in ASMI? You are the executive director now?

2. What's worked in the past and what are you looking to implement in the future with international markets?
3. When you are marketing to those different countries, who are some of your main competitors?
4. Do you think when someone is in a store and they are deciding on a type of seafood to buy, they are educated on Farmed vs. Not Farmed?
5. With education, what's the role it plays in marketing?
6. What are some of your big, upcoming challenges ahead?
7. When you were talking about differentiating your brand, what are some main things you focus on?

Mary Verdin, Verdin in San Luis Obispo, California:

1. What are some strategies you use with brand differentiation? Can you provide some examples?
2. What specific things do you look at in a company when you are trying to differentiate them? (culture, area, people, methods, etc.)
3. Have you ever worked with food companies in the past? How do you help food companies differentiate one restaurant from another?
4. What are some examples of companies who really stand out in successfully differentiating their brands?
5. What is the number one error you see companies making when they are trying to differentiate themselves?

Data Collection

The method of data collection for this study are individual interviews with each expert. The interviews conducted were during December of 2015 and lasted approximately 30 – 60 minutes each. During the interviews, a questionnaire was used, as well as leading to other discussion topics depending on the interviewee's position.

Data Presentation

The data collected during each interview was recorded and transcribed. Respondents were told at the beginning of the interview that it was to be recorded, and they verbalized that it was acceptable. Recording devices were used to ensure accuracy and objectivity.

Limitations

A Public Relations campaign for a specific organization could possibly be a desired alternative to a research paper. However, the research will lie a base for the practitioner to carry out a campaign.

Delimitations

Because Alaska seafood marketing was chosen as the topic of research, it is a delimitation to the study that interviews and research were not performed in the state of Alaska. The student attends California Polytechnic University in San Luis Obispo, California. Therefore, research and interviews were conducted from afar. Phone interviews always risk the quality that a face-to-face interview would have.

Furthermore, many of the responses are opinion-based from those in the industry. Many of the experts are from Alaska, and therefore are most likely more willing to be in favor of Alaska seafood. However, one consumer was interviewed from Arizona and is a registered dietician, while the other is a CEO of a marketing firm in California, and therefore may be more unlikely to have a bias towards a specific type of desired seafood.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Chapter 4 provides biographies of the experts interviewed in the research study and identifies the respondents' key points to the questionnaire. The data was collected through recorded interviews lasting from 30 minutes to 1 hour. Some points will be presented in paraphrased responses, while others will be in direct quotations. Next, the answers will be analyzed and aligned to the original research questions and the existing literature on the subjects reviewed in Chapter 2.

Description of Participants in their Areas of Expertise

Alaska Government and Seafood:

William "Bill Thomas" (Appendix A) is a native Alaskan and has been fishing for 46 years, specifically gillnetting. He has also been fishing for halibut for 42 years, hand-trolled for eight years, and shrimped for eight years. He has owned three fishing boats in his life, one of which he built that he still owns today. Thomas has worked for 23 years as a lobbyist in Washington D.C. and Juneau, Alaska. He spent eight years in the Alaska state legislature as the Southeast Alaska Representative where he was in charge of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game budget for six years, and Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute's budget for two years.

Seafood Distributing:

Harry Rietz (Appendix B) owns the Haines Packing Company in Haines, Alaska, where he runs the family business. He has been working in seafood for 15

years, and his father, Hugh Rietz, the original owner of Haines Packing Company, has been in the industry since the 1960s. Harry has expanded the business rapidly, opening two fish shacks and a retail store. The cannery is one of the oldest sites in Alaska. All five species of wild Alaska salmon are delivered fresh to their dock by the local fishing fleet, and are processed immediately. They also provide halibut, Dungeness crab, and striped shrimp and ship worldwide.

Communications and Seafood:

Tyson Fick (Appendix C) loves catching, cooking, and eating fish, taking pictures of fish, writing about fish, and even talking about fish. As the Communications Director at Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI), he is in charge public relations, social media, industry communications, and serves as government liaison and official spokesman for Alaska Seafood. He is a lifelong Alaskan with a marketing degree from Washington State University who has lived and worked in many communities throughout Alaska including Juneau, Bethel, Kotzebue, Anchorage, Girdwood, and Skwentna among others. He has made his living as a fisherman, a cook, a lodge owner, a flight dispatcher, construction worker, legislative aide and was the legislative liaison for the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development before joining ASMI.

Marketing and Seafood:

Alexa Tonkovich (Appendix D) is the Executive Director of Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute. She was born and raised in Juneau, Alaska but has also worked in Japan. Prior to working for Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, she worked for

the State of Alaska's Division of Elections. With ASMI, Tonkovich started as the Asia Marketing Coordinator, and then worked as the Asia & Emerging Markets Manager. In 2013 she took over the International Program Director, managing ASMI's marketing programs in 21 countries in eight regions. In 2015 she was selected as the Executive Director of the agency, managing international and domestic marketing efforts as well as technical, communications, and global food aid programs.

Consumer/Diet and Health Education:

Lea Ann Holzmeister (Appendix E) is a registered dietician and certified diabetes educator. She has practiced for over 30 years, helping people successfully enjoy the art and science of healthy eating. She has written several nutrition books and writes a monthly magazine column on smart supermarket shopping.

Marketing:

Mary Verdin (Appendix F) has almost 25 years of marketing experience. She started her own firm in 2003, where the company has now grown into 16 employees. The firm assists clients throughout the Central Coast of California and across the state, and has been recognized for numerous awards. Mary Verdin has been recognized several times including Rotarian of the Year, Woman of Distinction, Community and Public Service Professional Award, among others. She serves on numerous boards and committees involving community foundations, chamber of commerce, and public relations.

Responses Divided by Subject and Respondent:

Brand Differentiation:

Bill Thomas

Questions regarding “differentiation” were directed to Thomas in hopes of answers that reflected his knowledge of Alaska government and policies.

1. What do you feel differentiates Alaska from other seafood industries?

- “From other states, is the conservation. The difference between us and other states is that we do pay to use fish and generate income for the state and the people, the community. That, I think is a big difference.”

2. How important is it for consumers to know how their food came to them?

How does Alaska do this? How important is it to show this in the marketing?

- “ASMI does show this culture in marketing. They have different pictures of older and younger people. The main thing is that people see you catching the fish. It’s not the big trawlers, there are different sizes of vessels. We have set netters, hand trawlers, bottom trawlers, there are different fishing groups and organizations that harvest resources. Whereas farmed fish... they never leave the pens, they just sit and then they harvest them. That’s the key thing.”

Harry Rietz

Rietz was asked questions regarding brand differentiation from a business-owner's standpoint.

1. How would you describe your product as different from other companies?
 - “Our product is all caught and processed out of Haines, which is pretty unique in itself. All of our stuff is processed by hand, versus a lot of bigger plants where its all run through a machine and mass-produced in a giant plant. So, we have a lot smaller crew, its more meticulous and quality is definitely the top of our priority. Everything is brought in within 24 hours of being caught, and then processed within an additional 24 hours of being brought in. We make sure we handle everything though the process with utmost care. And then, just you know Alaskan products, there's sockeye and other salmon and crab caught off the California, Oregon, Washington coast. But Alaska has that niche for being what people want.”
2. When you are selling your product, do you talk about the culture, or how its locally caught? Do you think that helps sell your product?
 - “Yeah, I know we need to do that more. We could create a label, like Copper River salmon created a label and they market it so well and get a premium price for it. We need to start doing that more. But right now what we push is our family owned and operated, based in Haines, Alaska, hiring local employees. We're a small mom and pop store focused on quality. So, that's kind of our push. But we need to sell

Haines and the mountains and the whole cannery scene. That would be the next level when we start making all kinds of labels. That's what we're going to lean towards – making sure people see where the product is coming from and how cool of a location it actually is.”

Tyson Fick

Fick was asked questions regarding brand differentiation from a marketing standpoint. As the Communications Director for Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, he is an expert on this topic.

1. What are some strategies you use in differentiating your brand from other seafood brands?

- “Well, there's a few things. For one, we talk about how its wild. That's automatically a differentiation between farmed products and wild, because everything around here is wild. And second, we talk about the place. The origin. In that, seafood is a product of its environment, and Alaskan waters provide some of the best environment that you can imagine. So, those are the two main things. But what we hear about is that people like Alaska seafood because it tastes better. At the end of the day it's about food. So you know with the combination of why it tastes better, because of the clean waters in this awesome place, and the people that take such good care of it all the way to market.”

2. How does Alaska culture, fishery methods, and beauty of the area play a role?

- “It plays a huge role. When we talk about sustainability messaging, which is kind of something that has come to just be expected, but for years it was not the case, so we can talk about how sustainability was written into the constitution when we became a state, how fisheries management is a large reason why we’re a state at all. And, then the historic track record of very, very impressive results when we really took charge of our fisheries and our own destiny both in statehood and later on in the early 70s. All these things that were there to protect the fish and make sure the fish came back. Not just salmon but crab and everything. We got the opportunity to learn from other people’s mistakes and have successful fisheries. Beyond that, there’s real interest in a marketing angle with places with native culture. You know, that’s not the norm around the world at all. So, that is a calling card, a selling point, that supporting these fisheries helps support small, local communities. And helps keep a tradition and connection to the place.”

3. Specifically, how do you market native culture?

- “There is imagery that gets used in ads, particularly in Europe. We have spokes-fishermen. We have PR work, tourism in small communities where a lot of times that’s a larger portion of native

Alaskans. So, we get to know those individuals. Videos, you name it, that's a huge part of who we are."

Lea Ann Holzmeister

Holzmeister was asked as a consumer what makes a seafood brand desirable. With this information, perhaps those who market Alaska seafood can gain insight to a dietician/consumer's viewpoint.

1. What do you think makes a specific seafood brand desirable? Is there anything you see that makes you choose one over the other?

- I guess I don't pay as much attention to that as I should. I look for indicators of freshness overall. Because I buy it at Costco, I feel like there's a layer of quality that's built into where I'm buying already. So, I look at 'sell by' dates and also freshness indicators like the smell and the appearance and texture of it. I've written an article about seafood before and done a bit of research before just so people understand how to buy it.

Alexa Tonkovich

As the executive director of Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, Tonkovich was asked how they differentiate their brand in a similar way that Fick was. From the marketing standpoint, how does this organization differentiate their brand from the others?

1. When you differentiate your brand, what are some main things you focus on?

- “Wild, natural, sustainable is our tagline. But, you know, that can even be a challenge. There are other products that are natural, there are other products that are wild, there are other products that are sustainable. One of the things we have that no one else has is the Alaska story, and that seems to resonate pretty well with people. The nature, fishing families, generations of Alaskans fishing, the fact that fishing is important to our native Alaska culture. I think that’s probably the most unique thing. There are other places that have something, but I think that’s one of our big opportunities. We have to sort of be flexible and see where markets are going. Health is a really big concern in almost every country. We’ve adapted some of our marketing materials more to target healthy eating, light recipes, targeting athletes, that kind of thing. There’s several points and it really depends on the market. It kind of has to keep developing. The Alaska story really helps with that. Any time we’ve brought anyone to Alaska, they are just blown away. Unfortunately we can’t do that for everybody, but any opportunity to tell that story it does seem to work well. No one can ever quite copy us.”

Mary Verdin

Verdin was asked these questions as an expert in the industry on marketing, branding, public relations, and more. She has worked with various types of organizations and companies, and her knowledge demonstrates these successes.

1. What are some strategies that Verdin uses with brand differentiation?

- We have a whole intake process we do, because we need to understand who you are and how you're different. We always do a SWOT analysis – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats. It helps the client because generally beforehand they know their product so well it is hard for them to see it, but they can ask questions. They tell us who we are and what they do. We will help them add things they maybe they didn't realize. We are big proponents in research. Everything we do is based on strategy. Our first core value is integrity, our second is strategy. I think looking at the competitive landscape is really important. The example I always give is that even if its not a differentiating factor, nobody else is talking about it...use it. Maybe with seafood, I think of salmon and I think of 'Which one has mercury and which one doesn't? Is it sustainable fishing?' all of those things are important. Now, maybe because of regulation, I don't know the industry but, maybe because of regulation, all salmon fishing is now sustainable. But, I don't know that as a consumer, but if you're the first one to tell me, I'm going to hang with you. I'm going to buy their product. I remember everybody wanted fat free, they didn't care about calories, salt, any of that, it just had to be fat free. So pretzels,

which have never had fat in them put really big on their bag “100% fat free” you know, something that the pretzel market wouldn’t miss. And the other pretzel companies were like ‘Oh man, our pretzels are fat free too, pretzels are fat free.’ But they didn’t say it, and totally missed out. So, that’s a big part of it too, and that’s an important role for the marketing person to come in on, because that’s that outside perspective where somebody inside knows it too well and its hard to understand.”

2. What specific things do you look at in a company when you’re trying to differentiate them as far as culture, area, people, methods? Is there anything you notice the company misses?

- “A lot of times they miss things just in explaining who they are. Rolls-Royce was trying to figure out how to get people to understand what it’s like to ride in a Rolls-Royce. This is not like riding in any other car. The author is reading the technical implications, and he finds the clock that makes a sound. “The engine is so quiet you can hear the clock ticking’-genius. And he got that from just understanding the product, just reading...’there’s got to be something in here that I can pull out that differentiates in the market.’ So I think that having create-ability is important, but really, understanding the product.”

3. How do you help food companies differentiate themselves, such as restaurants?

- “We do a lot of tourism marketing and I think similar things apply. Don’t try to be something you’re not. Everybody talks about the experience. So, if you’re talking about fish, its not about, ‘so here’s a fish’ It’s about that great party you’re going to have with your friends coming over and in your head you start being the person with the grilled salmon and bottles...Everybody is after the experience, it can be a romantic experience, a family-friendly making memories experience, it can be reconnecting with an old friend experience. It can be a lot of different experiences, there’s no right one, but you have to understand what’s authentic to that product.”

4. What are some examples of companies who really stand out in successfully differentiating their brands?

- “For awhile, I wouldn’t use the word ‘brand’ because it became this buzz word. People were using the word without knowing what it meant. People were saying ‘Oh, look at my logo, I’m branding’ Well, the logo is representation, its not branding. The brand is everything. We always say three things. First of all, the brand needs to be recognizable. The brand can control that. The second thing is what do you promise? This is when advertising and marketing comes into play. So I have an ad, and I’m going to tell you ‘on Tuesday you can get this’, you know what I’m promising, that’s controllable too. What you can’t control, which is the most important thing about branding, is that the

brand delivers. That's my experience with you. So it's that whole thing, the experience, delivering on a promise, being consistent, all of those things make a brand. So the one I always like to use is Apple. They cost more, but I know it's going to be user-friendly. I get some new apple thing and the package even feels innovative, user-friendly, it's the latest thing. So I think that's an example of really good branding. So, it's targeting those people correctly. Who are you talking to and what is that message to get to those people."

Promotion

Harry Rietz

Rietz answered the promotions questions from a business-owners standpoint. Because he is just marketing and promoting his specific product, his answers differ from other respondents.

1. As far as promoting your product, what methods do you use?

- "Word of mouth is a big one. We've been lucky in that everything going into the season is kind of already pre-sold. We haven't had to actually do a lot of door knocking and trying to push our product. We pretty much have most of it sold. But I guess what I did first of all to get a couple of our bigger accounts...I just did a lot of cold calling and sent a lot of free samples. Free samples go a long way. So what I did was went through a directory of distributors and grocery store chains

and said 'Hey, I'd like to send you a box of our seafood, would you be available to pick it up next Thursday or whatever.' And sent down a variety. That might have cost me a couple thousand dollars in free samples. But, out of those boxes, I landed 2 or 3 big accounts which have carried us through 5 or 6 years. So that was my initial marketing strategy."

Tyson Fick

Fick was asked questions regarding promotions as an expert in the communications industry. Promotions methods used for Alaska seafood are varied and unique.

1. What promotion methods do you use? What previous tactics have you utilized? What recent ones have you implemented?

- "There's a few ways. One is with promotion partners like retail chains, food service operators, chains, or distributors, or universities. We did demos across the country. You actually have to have somebody in the store showing how to cook a piece of sockeye salmon. We did that all over, restaurants when the first halibut and black cod are showing up, maybe they are doing promotions those first few weeks or months, like 'hey it's the new season.' The other way is through our own paid media. So we would do print, online, ads, homepage takeovers. Radio ads, when people are driving home. We would work and promote through our owned media...website, social media channels, which

we're active on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest. We have our calendar and we would use that to amplify promotions and also to amplify the earned media, which is all the PR work. Whenever we get a placement in a store, a story, whatever, we would use that for Facebook content, Twitter, whatever to amplify on the earned media side."

2. Is there anything you guys have tried that hasn't worked in the past where you realized your time was better spent elsewhere? Whether its with social media, or promotions in general?

- "I have my own opinion. I think, to me, it would be like hand-to-mouth consumer shows, there's people that have advocated for that, but I don't see the value. I can't imagine that it pays off and people remember who we are. Other than, to go to some of these to maintain the top level celebrity chef relationships, the real top leaders that keep the PR machine working. It's extremely valuable to us when a chef like John Besh says, "Alaska salmon", that's it, that's awesome, what we need for good PR. But to hand samples to random people drunk on wine, I don't see how that works.

Alexa Tonkovich

Promotions questions were asked to Tonkovich in hopes of gaining more insight into the international market.

1. What has worked in the past, and what were you looking to implement with international markets?

- “We have programs in 21 countries, 8 regions. In most markets we have programs divided up into consumer trade and food service. We sort of target each segment differently. Each market is really different, so there’s certain attributes that we promote in every market. Wild, natural, sustainable, healthy eating, good tastes, just different attributes and different communication channels, and different activities work better for some markets versus others. In terms of consumer, we don’t have huge budgets for any of our markets so, we do consumer advertising but it can be kind of limited by budget. We do social media, PR tasting type event, try to generate food press . On the trade side, we have a pretty big trade program in most countries, just because a lot of trade education is needed for our product. In terms of food service we do hotel and restaurant promotion, chef work has been pretty effective for us, that’s true for domestic market as well. For international marketing, some of our products are high end so developing recipes can work really well. Or, if we are trying to introduce a newer product to the market, you know working with a team of chefs to develop local recipes, or to put it on more menus or to have a special tasting demonstration. It’s just a good way to get people to try the product, make chefs try the product. Its more just finding a mix and knowing your market and knowing what will work and wont,

or being flexible enough to say “well we tried this, now let’s try something else”

Brand Identity

Bill Thomas

Questions regarding brand identity were addressed to Thomas pertaining the state of Alaska specifically.

1. Why do you think consumers might desire Alaska seafood over other types?

- “They want Alaska seafood because its wild. Even if it comes from the hatchery they don’t stay in the hatchery for long. They’re incubated, they’re hatched and then they are taken to a site, fed for a month or two to get them to imprint in that area, then they’re released and feed naturally, out there in the gulf, or North Pacific somewhere.”

Harry Rietz

Brand identity questions were addressed towards Rietz regarding facts to why his consumers may enjoy Alaska’s products over other areas.

1. Why do you think people enjoy Alaska seafood?

- “Size. For example, say the Dungeness crab...the minimum size in Alaska is a 6 and a half inch shell on the back of the crab. In Oregon and Washington it a 5 and a half inch crab. So an inch is a lot, quite a

bit smaller of a crab. We generally get bigger, more full crab out here. So, people like that. Same with the sockeye salmon on the Chilkoot side here in Haines, Alaska. We have some of the biggest sockeye salmon anywhere, they're like a 7 pound average. They're huge. So that would be a big factor I guess is that Alaska produces a bigger species of fish, a bigger product. Just Alaska itself, being pristine. People know that it's a huge producer, everybody kind of looks to Alaska for seafood. It kind of has that niche already."

Tyson Fick

Fick was asked questions regarding brand identity to see how the industry focuses their marketing efforts.

1. Why do you think people enjoy seafood, particularly that of Alaska's?
 - "There's a few reasons why people would turn to seafood generally as a category. One of the major ones is health. As people try to eat healthier, seafood definitely steps in there. It's a better alternative to bacon and whatever other protein you've got. Generally if people have a good experience with it, its because they like the taste. What we find is, its about health and nutrition and it tastes good, its American and local."

2. What are ways that you are currently strengthening your brand identity and what are you looking to do in the future?

- “We are working through all the channels. I would expect lower budgets and we will see less consumer advertising. I think our money is better spent domestically on PR efforts and familiarization tours. Creating real advocates. We’ve got members of media that are huge fans and that takes us a long way. Staying on course and sticking to key messages and promises is good, not to be distracted by potential issues. Dealing with problems like sustainability certifications. There’s a real interest to get back to our core marketing efforts.”

Education

Alexa Tonkovich

Education questions were directed at Tonkovich in methods regarding how the subject plays a role in marketing efforts.

1. With education, what’s the role it plays in marketing?

- “Education is a huge part of what we do. A part of promoting something is educating why it matters, why Alaska. In most of our markets, we might be educating the trade, could be retail, process, importers, restaurants, why they should look for Alaska, why their consumers might prefer it, or how to handle the products, when they can buy it, that kind of thing. On the food service side, again, handling, buying frozen products, how to handle and prepare Alaska seafood. In some of the countries working with wild and frozen fish, they can be unfamiliar things. And, we all know there is nothing better than

properly cooked seafood and there is nothing worse than an overcooked, dry fish. That's an important piece of what we do because that is what the consumer thinks. If they go to a restaurant and order Alaska salmon and its completely overcooked, they are left with that bad impression. So again, consumer education is important at the point of sales, everywhere, where their fish is from, benefit of Alaska seafood. Education is just a theme across everything we do, it has to be...because it is unfamiliar to a lot of people."

2. Do you think when someone is in a store and they are deciding on a type of seafood to buy, they are educated on farmed versus wild seafood?

- "There's a lot of different things going on there. For one, a lot of consumers don't have a lot of education about their seafood, how its harvested, whether its wild or farmed, where it even comes from, adding on top of that, there's the labeling in grocery stores, and restaurants. I go to restaurants all the time and ask the server if its wild or farmed, and I know enough now that 90% of the time they give me the wrong information. And that's in the US, not China or somewhere, where they are even probably less familiar with Alaska seafood. And then on top of that, some people do prefer farmed seafood. Its hard to explain, especially with marketing to people in Alaska because they think 'we have the best seafood in the world, why would you eat anything else?' I get this question all the time with

people from Alaska, 'Do you really have to promote Alaska seafood?' But yes, yes we do. With sushi restaurants, that's a big way you could get farmed seafood into any country, a lot of chefs prefer to work with farmed fish because it has very consistent size and look and texture, whereas wild salmon can be quite variable. Some people would prefer to work with "fresh", they have a bias against frozen seafood, even though it can be very fresh. People have different preferences, not everybody likes wild fish."

Lea Ann Holzmeister

Questions regarding education directed to Holzmeister were mostly based upon her knowledge of diet and health. It was interesting to see what she herself does, as well as what she recommends for her clients.

1. What do you recommend to your clients about seafood?

- "In general, I recommend increasing intake because its actually one of the dietary guidelines and the evidence behind that is that it's a healthier type of protein with lower fat. It has healthier fats in it. So, overall it is just a basic recommendation for people to increase seafood consumption."

2. Can you describe your personal seafood diet?

- "I would say that it's a little bit of a challenge in Arizona because we don't have a lot of fresh seafood, and its also more expensive. But I

would say about 2-3 times a week, I include some type of seafood.

That's kind of the recommendation of the minimum amount."

3. Are your friends and coworkers similar in their dietary habits?

- "If you talked to my dietary colleagues, they would all eat at least as much as me or more. I think it has a lot to do with your knowledge of healthy eating. And also, affordability. The thing about seafood and other healthy foods like nuts and fresh fruit, is that there's hardly anything you can say wrong about them, but its how to distribute them and make them affordable so that the consumption goes up."

4. Can you tell me a little more about the article that you write?

- "It's an article I write every other month for a magazine, it's an analysis of different sections of the grocery store. That article was on seafood and it's a little bit about the nutrition and diet, and then an analysis of different kinds of seafood. I prepared a table of all the different seafood and the nutrition composition of them so that people could tell the fat content and cholesterol, nutrients. I have done the same with things like tortilla chips. I took 15 brands of tortilla chips and analyzed them and talked about the different types. My article on seafood was on the fact that it has omega 3 fatty acids, lean protein, those kinds of things."

5. What recommendations would you give to the seafood market?

- “I’ve seen other food industries like some of the berries that have so many positive nutrient profiles...those industries that have tried to market their product more widely...but its making them affordable that can really cut into the consumption. That’s the thing: available and affordable, that’s the key. I think there’s a lot of good ways you can freeze fresh fish quickly and make it available and reliable in quality, than trying to have fresh fish in parts of the country available. I think that those types of packaging and distributing attributes...we need more of that. I think that people know that its healthy and a really good alternative to beef. I don’t tell people not to eat beef, but to limit is as much as they can. As people become more educated about health and nutrition, its just a fact. If you’re not going to eat red meat, you need other sources of protein and iron, it is just good nutrition knowledge and how to balance it in your diet.

Perceptions/Misconceptions

Harry Rietz

Harry was asked what sorts of misconceptions he has to address with customers of his specific product.

1. What misconceptions do you run into with consumers that you have to correct or show them what’s actually there?

- “Everybody always says “We want fresh seafood.” Fresh seafood is frozen, when you take care of it right and flash-freeze at 30 below zero, and get it cold quick, that’s really the best way to handle and freeze a product. If something comes out of the water fresh and you ship it to say, Bozeman, Montana, and it has been out of the water for 6 or 7 days on a truck and gets in case it’s still fresh but its quality is not there. Whereas if something comes out of the water and its frozen within 24 hours and you thaw it out it’s going to be a way better product than the “fresh” that’s been sitting on the truck for 6-7 days. But people always say, “where’s the fresh stuff?” There’s a term in the seafood world called “fresh-frozen” and if something comes in and its frozen within a day or 2 its really a better quality product.”

Tyson Fick

Fick was addressed this question as a standpoint of perceptions of the general public.

1. What misconceptions do you run into with consumers that you have to work or show them through?

- “One that comes up all the time is contaminants perceived. The mercury myths I would call them. You can’t find a case of mercury poisoning because of fish if you do the research. But everyone’s afraid of it, they don’t want to eat too much seafood because there’s mercury in it. But the fact of the matter is, you have absolutely nothing to

worry about unless you're eating shark every day all year, which who does that? Its not just mercury, its Fukushima, or arsenic, or whatever. Perceived contaminants presents a challenge for us. A way we combat that is science, peer reviewed, here's the facts. So when these stories come up we have something to counter with, in a form of written statement or direct emails, or contact writers who pick up those kinds of stories and try to give them the other side of it. And you know, that's been a pretty successful approach. Another pretty big combater is sustainability issues. We've got environmental groups that are constantly beating the drum that the ocean is horribly overfished and you shouldn't eat seafood, or protect a specific area, or a particular gear type isn't agreeable. Often times they do this without science or telling the whole story which generally, ours is a pretty good one to tell and it's a been a successful collaboration between fisheries and government. You know, our fisheries are what everybody is striving for, but that part gets left out of the story."

Challenges

Bill Thomas

Questions regarding challenges were addressed to Thomas in the form of the seafood industry.

1. What are some of the biggest challenges you see right now in marketing Alaska seafood?

- “The number one issue would be funding. Without the proper funding, you can't have proper employees marketing fish for us. It is very important that we have that presence elsewhere. We were able to, with the extra funding, somewhat displace the farmed fish. But now I think we're going to slip backwards because we can't do that and compete. We can with what we have but not as easily done.”

Harry Rietz

With Harry Rietz, challenges were approached from a business standpoint. His challenges may not necessarily be in the marketing aspect, but other parts of owning a company.

1. What are some of the biggest challenges of the company?

- “It used to be finding help. Getting local people to come work at a fish plant was kind of hard. Another one is being seasonal. Our water set-up is only about 6 months a year. So, when it freezes we have to drain the water or the pipes will freeze. So you may have to make your whole season in months with all those start up and shut-down costs. That's a struggle for seasonal operation. And then, just staying on top of everything. The cannery is a pretty big place. So there's lots going on, lots of freezers and buildings to maintain. The dock, the crane, lots

of things to keep track of you could say, kind of year round. When the production stops, when the season's over you still have to keep an eye on things and make sure they are being maintained. But as far as the plant and production goes, we're pretty lucky. My dad put in new equipment in 2006, 2007 so when we took over the plant it was all new state-of-the-art stuff and its pretty up there as far as the quality, what we're running in the plant so that's really helpful."

Tyson Fick

Fick was addressed this question in terms of the institute in general, as well as challenges in the future for the fishing industry, diet, global changes, etc.

1. What are some of your biggest challenges you see in the future?

- I think ocean acidification is going to be a huge challenge for fisheries and politics. Another is the Russian seafood import ban, makes it hard for people to make any kind of profit, which then makes it difficult to have fisheries. These things kind of all play into each other.

2. What are some of the biggest challenges that ASMI has overcome?

- "The recovery of salmon and the crisis of the early 2000s. This low price is much different than the one we had back in 2002 where we had very low prices plus a relatively very low harvest. What happened then was really amazing when differentiating markets, creating new markets, really working on product quality improvements, through

the technical program with developing care and handling standards all the way through the boat through carriers, ground-shippers, all the way to the chefs and the retailers and programs to make sure no part of that process broke down. So you have that process all the way to the consumer, having easily accessible recipes, same for the retail. And seeing products form diversification where less and less salmon was going into a can, and new products were developed so we had salmon burgers, and all sorts of values added to the product. Like, Europe used pink salmon in fish fingers. That kind of thing where having all those new products and developing those new markets really was successful in building up the value and stimulating new demand for salmon where we saw a decade of extreme growth. And that effect is that even today after this year, permit values are still up over 250 percent on average in salmon permits across the state to where it was two years ago.”

3. In regards to challenges, we see many people going towards a plant based diet. Any plans for approaching that?

- “That’s a major culinary trend right now. I think seafood and lean protein is still a part of the picture. I think it presents us a real opportunity, especially a premium product, like, say, king crab, to be a part of a larger recipe. It doesn’t always have to be ”stuff yourself full of crab”. It can still be an important part of any plant-based diet. We

would hope that works to our advantage. We are currently in a place where Americans eat as little as 15 pound of seafood a year on average, and over 150 pounds of sugar.”

Alexa Tonkovich

Tonkovich was asked challenge questions regarding the marketing and fishing realms of the industry.

1. What are some of your big, upcoming challenges ahead?

- “Right now we are in a pretty challenging time already. We’ve had pretty big harvests. The farmed supply of salmon is pretty steady, maybe even increasing in some areas. So, trying to get good value for your products in a market that might be oversupplied can be a challenge. Competition is stiff anyway, and then when you have that working against you it can be even harder. Budgeting is certainly a concern. In the state, we are in the middle of budget crisis already, and it can get worse. Knowing that we might be working with decreased budgets is a challenge because I think that all of the markets we are in are very important for different reasons. We are competing with other seafood and other proteins that might already be very very very well funded. So if we lose our funding we still have that competition. There’s geopolitical and global challenges. Currency is a challenge, that may be short-term, but with the dollar being strong, that impacts overseas. The challenge of losing Russia...that was a big market for us.

I'd say those are the immediate challenges. Thinking longer term, there will continue to be more competition, and differentiating our brand is always a challenge, and staying current with brand attributes and the channels we use to market them, we have to constantly be adapting that. I think for the industry, continuing to diversify the market we are in is very important. We have a lot of products that are overly dependent on one market. Japan is a pretty good example of that. They are really dependent on the Japan market, and if we don't continue to diversify where we offer our products, if we have market crashes, it is a tragedy for many of our segments of the industry. I'd say being diverse in our strategy and in our markets is a long-term challenge."

Mary Verdin

Challenges were addressed to Verdin in the forms of common errors or issues she sees organizations having from an outsider's standpoint.

1. What is the number one error you see companies making when they are trying to differentiate themselves?

- "Everything is about authenticity now. Social media really changed things. It is not a one-way conversation anymore, it's a two-way conversation. I think the other thing is not being strategic about things. Social media has become a very important piece of marketing. I think that it's hard to define. So, understanding social media, I think that's a

huge error. They think, oh I have a Facebook page, I know how to do that. They are inconsistent with their posts, there's no strategy behind their posts. So I think social media needs understanding. And technology changes all the time, people always ask what the biggest challenges of technology are. But, marketing is still the same. It's the right people, and the right message, at the right time. There's so much you can do with the fishing industry, seafood, recipes. I don't like the idea of farmed. So, there's so many things that "wild" could do to raise people's awareness of it. "

Seafood Marketing Research Questions

For this project, the following five research questions were designed for the study to analyze what current implementation tactics are being utilized among industry professionals, and to collect information from experts in their field on marketing Alaska seafood.

Research Question 1: How does one differentiate their brand?

- "Separate yourself from other organizations in unique and unprecedented ways. The brands that stand out from their competition are those who understand that strategic branding goes deeper than visuals. Understanding your brand through internal beliefs and communications, understanding your best potential audiences and understanding and differentiating from other products are three things that make this happen" (Shepard, 2014).

Research Question 2: What promotion methods can be used?

- “One aspect of promoting a brand or product is giving your publics some background on the subject. This is done in different ways, one of which is storytelling. By showing, and not just telling, you can further promote your brand. Storytelling is a valuable tool in social marketing – one that enables you to illustrate the behavioral changes you’re striving to create as opposed to simple telling people what they should do” (Beakey 2014).

Research Question 3: How does an organization build a stronger brand identity?

- “The techniques of branding used well by the globe’s leading companies have tactics that can be implemented by regular organizations and institutions. An organization must have a powerful brand strategy. They focus on what is happening in practice and what is and isn’t working in their branding efforts” (Temporal, 2014).

Research Question 4: What education and behavior-influencing methods can be implemented?

- Monterey Bay doesn’t believe any seafood market is completely immune to seafood fraud and illegal fishing, but their goal is for people to simply be educated. The executive director of the Monterey

Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch, the country's leading program for sustainable seafood, says she wants people to simply ask. "But this is why Seafood Watch also assesses farm-raised seafood. We really want people to eat seafood—it's a healthy option—and if you take the wild caught supply and couple that with sustainably harvested or farm raised seafood, you *can* feed the world. We just have to make sure that we don't develop farm-raised seafood in a manner that has other environmental impacts" (Dianto Kemmerly, 2015).

Research Question 5: How do perceptions impact consumer's buying choices and what challenges is the industry facing?

- "Monterey Bay Aquarium has recently determined Alaska salmon to be the only low-risk salmon in terms of four sustainability criteria: the inherent vulnerability of the fish, the effects of fishing on the overall habitat, the status of wild stocks, and the nature of the by-catch" (Larson, 2015).

Interview Data

For this study, it was extremely important to hear what experts in the industry said due to the small amount of current research on the subject of marketing Alaska seafood. To obtain this data, Bill Thomas, an Alaska government and fisheries expert, Harry Rietz, a business-owner in the fishing industry expert, Tyson Fick, a communications and fisheries expert, Alexa Tonkovich, an international relations and fisheries expert, Lea Ann Holzmeister, a registered

dietician, and Mary Verdin, marketing expert, were interviewed for the study. Each were asked questions specifically tailored to his or her own expertise. However, the following tables present the respondents' answers to overlapping questions. These tables allow an easier-to-grasp view of each person's perspective. Because people's points of expertise lie in different areas, tables vary in size.

Research Question #1: How does one differentiate their brand?

The existing literature states that differentiating one's brand is done best through understanding and executing methods in geographic attributes (Houldsworth, 2003). Some also believe the greatest impact comes from focusing on the product rather than the promotion (Ellman 2015). Generating discussion among your publics is important (Hersfield & Mintz, 2012) and understanding your brand through internal beliefs and communications is a necessary place to start (Shepard 2014). This question was asked to experts in the field to see what differentiating their brand meant to them, how Alaska does this specifically, and what tactics they use.

Table 1 summarizes the respondents' answers to this question. Many people involved in the fishing industry answered similarly, with points of differentiation involving Alaska's culture, environment, and fishing methods. However, those not living in Alaska talked about freshness and the marketing expert talked in general about good strategy with differentiating a brand.

Table 1

Brand Differentiation

Respondent	Brand Differentiation
Bill Thomas	Conservation, unique fishing methods, native culture, different than farmed fish
Harry Rietz	Locally caught and processed, quality is top priority, Alaska has niche, pristine location
Tyson Fick	Wild, clean waters and environment, taste, care Sustainability, native culture, small communities, tradition
Lea Ann Holzmeister	Indicators of freshness
Alexa Tonkovich	Wild, natural, sustainable, Alaska story, health
Mary Verdin	Research, integrity, strategy, talk about what nobody else is, experience, brand should be recognizable, controllable promise, it delivers. Roll's Royce: creatability, understanding product. Apple: user-friendly, innovative

Research Question 2: What promotion methods can be used?

The existing literature on promotions encourages the industry to give their public some background on the subject. This can be done through storytelling (Beakey, 2014). They recommend illustrating behavior changes you're striving to create as opposed as to simply telling people what they should do. Alaska Fish and Game has their regulations available online and open to the general public. This way, they can educate visitors about how they regulate fisheries and keep them sustainable for years to come. Think about ways that your brand will add distinct value into your public's lives (Peck, 2015). Appeal to their emotions. The Stanleys say, a brand should be an experience.

Table 2 illustrates the respondents answer to this question. Harry Rietz answered the question as it pertained specifically to his business. Tyson Fick and Alexa Tonkovich answered for all of Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute. Other interviewees were not addressed this question specifically, as it did not pertain to their area of expertise.

Table 2

Promotion Methods

Respondent	Promotion Methods
Harry Rietz	Word of mouth, cold-calling, free samples
Tyson Fick	Partners, retail chains, service operators, distributors, demos, restaurants, paid media, owned media, PR, chef recommendations
Alexa Tonkovich	Certain attributes promoted to each market; wild, natural, sustainable, healthy eating, good tastes. Different attributes/communication channels/activities. Social media, PR tasting events, hotel and restaurant promotion, recipes, flexibility to experiment

Research Question 3: How does an organization build a stronger brand identity?

Existing literature on brand identity says that an organization should focus on their personal and cultural benefits. Temporal claims that good techniques of

branding should have tactics that can be implemented by regular businesses. The organization should be flexible and look at what is and isn't working.

Table 3 Brand identity questions to the experts mostly were asked in forms of how Alaska specifically identifies itself in branding efforts. Respondents based their answers mostly on what makes Alaska so special. To successfully identify a brand, it takes working through multiple channels.

Table 3

Brand Identity

Respondent	Brand Identity
Bill Thomas	Wild, not in hatcheries for long if so, natural.
Harry Rietz	Size of Alaska seafood, generally bigger. Pristine landscape.
Tyson Fick	Health, seafood is better alternative to other proteins. Good experience with taste. American and local. Working through all channels. Domestically on PR efforts and familiarization tours. Sticking to key messages and promises

Research Question 4: What education and behavior-influencing methods can be implemented?

Many consumers are uneducated about their purchasing decisions. They may make different choices if they knew exactly what they were buying, or what impact their purchase was having. The Monterey Bay Aquarium produced a pocket guide that educates consumers on what fish they are buying and how sustainable the fisheries are. The information is updated often and regulation on fisheries is taken into consideration.

Alexa Tonkovich discussed how education plays a big role in marketing Alaska seafood, while Lea Ann Holzmeister talked about the importance of seafood in one's diet.

Table 4

Education and Behavior-Influencing Methods

Respondent	Education and Behavior-Influencing
Alexa Tonkovich	<p>A part of promoting something is educating why it matters. Educate trade, retail, process, importers, restaurants, why Alaska, how to handle products, when they can purchase. Handling seafood, cooking seafood, consumer education, where fish is from, benefits.</p> <p>Consumers don't have a lot of education on wild vs. farmed. Labeling, people give wrong information, bias against frozen seafood, different preferences.</p>
Lea Ann Holzmeister	<p>Increase seafood intake, dietary guideline, healthy type of protein, healthy fats. Challenge to obtain fresh seafood in Arizona. Expensive.</p> <p>Recommends: Freeze fresh, available and affordable, packaging</p>

Research Question 5: How do perceptions impact consumer’s buying choices and what challenges is the industry facing?

Existing research discusses the many benefits of consuming seafood, particularly Alaska salmon. The Monterey Bay says that Alaska salmon is better than even organic farmed salmon. As Genetically Modified Salmon just became approved by the FDA, it is interesting to see what people’s perceptions are on the subject.

Perceptions, misconceptions and challenges were are addressed to the participants, and they were given the chance to voice those in the interviews. People involved in marketing Alaska seafood all agreed that funding was a issue.

Tables 5A and 5B

5A. Perceptions and Misconceptions

Respondent	Perceptions
Harry Rietz	People say that frozen seafood isn’t fresh, but they are wrong. Frozen seafood is a fresher, and better product, if handled properly.
Tyson Fick	Contaminants perceived, mercury myths, sustainability issues

5B. Challenges

Respondent	Challenges
Bill Thomas	Funding
Harry Rietz	Finding help, seasonal business with costs, maintenance
Tyson Fick	Ocean acidification, Russian seafood import ban, plant based diets presents opportunity
Alexa Tonkovich	Big harvests, trying to get good value for product in oversupplied market. Budgeting/funding. Geopolitical and global, losing Russia, more competition. Differentiating brand, staying current with brand attributes, diversifying market, diverse in strategy
Mary Verdin	Correct usage of social media

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Summary

The study was performed to research aspects of marketing Alaska seafood. While there are many challenges in the industry, such as genetically modified salmon being recently approved by the Food and Drug Administration, good marketing techniques help in alleviating these challenges. It was essential to collect data to discuss strategies in differentiating Alaska's brand from others, helping to create an identity specifically for Alaska products, and promoting these products and services.

To find more information on current information and strategies being used by professionals in these fields, experts were each interviewed based on the original research questions:

1. How does one differentiate their brand?
2. What promotion methods can be used?
3. How does an organization build a stronger brand identity?
4. What education and behavior-influencing methods can be implemented?
5. How do perceptions impact consumer's buying choices and what challenges is the industry facing?

Each research question was altered slightly to create applicable questions based on each respondent's area of expertise. The questionnaires provided a variety

of responses that were compared back with the existing literature of marketing Alaska seafood.

Discussion

By analyzing the data collected from Chapter 4, connections made between experts' responses provided during the interview process, and the existing literature found in Chapter 2, it is possible to make conclusions regarding the following original research questions.

Research question #1: How does one differentiate their brand?

The experts responded by discussing their perspectives on how Alaska seafood is different from its competitors. Thomas, Rietz, Fick, and Tankovich all concluded that the seafood being wild, the local native culture, the conservation of the area, and Alaska's pristine and beautiful location all play a role in differentiating the brand. Verdin suggested the best thing to do in differentiating a brand was talking about what no one else is.

The literature demonstrates a similar perspective. Making your product the hero is important (Ellman 2015), while others recommend separating your product in new and unprecedented ways. "Understanding your brand through internal beliefs and communications, understanding your best potential audiences and understanding and differentiating from other products are three things that make this happen" (Shepard 2014). They use *Airstream* as an example, as they focus on quality, image, and community.

Overall, one could conclude that differentiating a brand could be done with investigating specific differences about your product, that make your product the “hero”. Also, a brand should use the differentiation technique of talking about what no one else is already.

Research question #2: What promotion methods can be used?

The experts interviewed discussed a variety of methods they use for promoting their products. They ranged from “word-of-mouth” to social media with demos, tasting events, activities, and recipes in between. When chefs promote their product, Fick described how rewarding it is to have chefs promote their product. This is demonstrated in the Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory, consumers are more likely to respond when information is passed from the source to opinion leaders and then on to receivers (Bobbit & Sullivan, 2013). Tonkovich described how it depended on the specific market.

The literature addresses the importance of storytelling. “Storytelling is a valuable tool in social marketing – one that enables you to illustrate the behavioral changes you’re striving to create as opposed to simply telling people what they should do (Beakey 2014). The literature also suggested thinking of ways that your brand can add value, and will appeal to their emotions (Peck, 2015). The Stanleys. in their literature, believe food should be not just a tourism product but also an experience. Food can be part of a cultural experience, they say. “Food tourism in most regions of the world has been and needs to be integrated into traditional tourism activities,” (Stanley 2014).

Overall, it could be concluded that there are many different forms of promotion, and the mix depends on the certain group you are marketing to. Promotion methods should ensure that your brand is adding value and be part of an experience.

Research Question #3: How does an organization build a stronger brand identity?

Experts responded to this question in several ways. They agreed that having Alaska seafood be wild and natural helped identify its product. They also noted that the size of seafood from Alaska was generally bigger. Seafood is generally a healthier option compared to other types of protein, the experts claimed. Fick said Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute focuses on identifying their brand through all mediums and sticking to their key messages and promises.

The literature reflects a similar perspective, although a little more broad. They claim that an organization must have a powerful brand strategy (Temporal, 2014). They focus on what is happening in practice and what is and isn't working in their branding efforts.

In conclusion, seeing what is working and isn't working in building a stronger brand identity, and implementing necessary changes is important. Sticking to the key messages and focusing on what identifies your brand specifically helps with branding.

Research Question #4: What education and behavior-influencing methods can be implemented?

The experts all agreed that educating was a vital part of promotions. Whether it was educating the fish handlers, or the consumers themselves, education plays an important role in marketing. Tonkovich says that education is a huge part of what ASMI does. They educate people as to why they should choose Alaska products, how to handle and cook seafood, and the health benefits. She added that there was not a lot of education out there on farmed versus wild seafood. From a dietician's point of view, Holzmeister felt that seafood is the healthiest protein, and consumption in diets should increase.

The literature agrees that education is an extremely important part of promotion. The Source Credibility Theory suggests that the major factor in whether or not a message is believed is the credibility of its source (Bobbitt & Sullivan, 2013). This way, you aren't telling someone what to do, but why they should want to do it. Monterey Bay developed a pocket guide so that consumers were more knowledgeable when making purchases and decisions. The pocket guide tells them which types of seafood are more sustainable than others.

Both the literature and experts agree that education is one of the most important things when marketing successfully. Simply informing people so that they are better informed of their decisions can go a long ways in the marketing process.

Research Question 5: How do perceptions impact consumer's buying choices and what challenges is the industry facing?

As far as the product itself, experts agreed that fighting myths such as “frozen isn’t fresh”, perceived contaminants, and sustainability issues played a role. In the industry, ocean acidification, getting a good value for the product in an oversupplied market, increasing competition, and funding were all current and upcoming challenges. With the Food and Drug Administration’s recent approval of genetically modified salmon, that presents another obstacle. Verdin stressed the importance of social media and the impact it can have. For a lot of businesses, correctly using social media can be a huge challenge.

For perceptions in the literature, there is not a lot of previous knowledge of farmed vs. wild salmon. But, the Monterey Bay Aquarium considers Alaska products to be a top choice. A low-risk category of contaminated fish (mercury, pesticides, organic pollutant, etc.) are the wild-caught Alaska salmon. They have been found the lowest risk category of wild-caught salmon for regular consumption. “Monterey Bay Aquarium has recently determined Alaska salmon to be the only low-risk salmon in terms of four sustainability criteria: the inherent vulnerability of the fish, the effects of fishing on the overall habitat, the status of wild stocks, and the nature of the by-catch” (Larson 2015).

Perceptions and challenges can be broad, but it is important to battle waning opinions with scientific evidence, and presenting your findings to your publics. Social media will continue to be a useful tool in the marketing industry, and, if used correctly, will contribute to successes.

Recommendations for Practice

After completion of this study, substantial data has been collected and reviewed regarding the topic of marketing Alaska seafood. A variety of literature was reviewed, as well as an array of personalities interviewed. Given the information, it is important to highlight content useful for future professionals. Recommendations for practice include promoting unique characteristics of a product through talking about what no one else is, thinking of ways in which a brand can add value, and finding a niche in the marketplace.

Talk about what no one else is.

When an organization looks at their own brand, it can be difficult to analyze it in a way other viewers could. An outsider's perspective may be needed to notice something that really stands out about that brand. Things that seem obvious to the organization may not seem so obvious to the general public. For example, everyone in Alaska knows their seafood is wild and not genetically modified or farmed. However, many consumers are not aware of these facts. By talking about what no one else is, an organization can get ahead in their marketing efforts.

Mary Verdin provided an example with pretzels in the past. For awhile, the public desired everything to be fat free, and one company simply decided to write "fat free" on their packaging. Their brand became the most popular, even though the other pretzel companies also had fat free pretzels. Alaska could do this with their products as well. Even by something as simple as writing "not farmed" or "GMO-free", this strategy could take them a long way.

Add value to the brand.

With so many brands or products to choose from, consumers are seeking ways that the brand adds values to their life rather than just a one-time purchase. They want an experience, to be part of a community, and be proud of what they are involving themselves in. If a consumer has one bad experience with a brand, their impression may be forever tinted by that moment. Alexa Tonkovich from Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute mentioned how the organization is sometimes able to bring people to Alaska, and allow them to experience the brand and experience for themselves. When visitors travel to Alaska, it is important to leave them with a good lasting impression.

Some ways that many travelers get around Alaska are cruise ships and ferries. It is vital to have up-to-date seafood promotional materials aboard those vessels, along with first-rate seafood products to serve those customers. This way, when they travel home, they will know they want Alaska seafood on their dinner table, rather than another brand.

Challenges are opportunities for niches.

Both the literature and experts agreed that education is an extremely important part of marketing. By providing consumers with the background, implications, and scientific research of a product, they are better able to informed choices and will respect your organization because of it. Educating consumers as to why your product is the “hero” isn’t telling them what to do, it’s telling them why should do it.

As challenges arise in the industry such as genetically modified salmon being approved, competition on the rise, and trying to sell a product in an oversupplied market, it is important to see that while these are indeed challenges, they could also present opportunities for differentiation. If the marketplace was to become too overwhelmed with average seafood brands, an opportunity arises for a top-of-the chain, specialty seafood line. A “blue label,” for example, could be created. While Alaska wouldn’t be marketing to as wide of an audience, they may be honing in on a group of people willing to spend more for carefully caught and processed, wild, Alaska seafood.

Recommendations for Further Research

Because this study was about marketing Alaska seafood, it did not go into as much depth with sustainability issues, competitors, etc. While the subject area was broad, it was focused on the aspects of marketing a seafood brand, and its topics stuck to that idea. Future research could be done with sustainability issues in seafood, present and future competitors, and more. Also, because this study was based on Alaska specifically, further research could be done to examine industries in other parts of the world.

Study Conclusion

Overall, the study presented collective opinions of several experts in their areas of expertise and a review of literature on the topic. It discussed brand differentiation and identity, promotion strategies, as well as perceptions and challenges. It is meant to provide some general marketing knowledge, as well as

tactics for marketing Alaska seafood specifically. Three experts from Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute were interviewed because they play a very large role in marketing seafood from all over Alaska. People at ASMI certainly are experts in their field, but recommendations for practice were included as suggestions on how to go a step further.

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Appendix A

Interview Transcripts: William "Bill" Thomas

The following interview was conducted to obtain expert opinions on Alaska seafood through someone with experience in government and the impact of the seafood industry.

Interviewer: Anna Jacobson

Respondent: Fisherman and former Southeast Alaska State Representative
(Bill Thomas)

Date of Interview: 11/10/2015

Interview Transcription:

Anna Jacobson: "Why do you feel it was necessary to double ASMI's budget and what led up to that?"

Bill Thomas: "We are looking at price of fish, always looking at price and we are looking at it and saw that in the past people paid 1%. Legislature changed it to ASMI paying the 1%. And since we were paying 1%, of our gross, of our fishing. We were looking at staff and noticing contribution made by fishermen versus contribution that the state was giving wasn't matching. We were actually continuing more. So we said okay, lets redo the formula which we did. And, we were actually able to max (match) the contribution made by the state of Alaska by changing the operating budget. That worked? Up until about a year ago when they cut the budget automatically rather than looking at why it was changed, and it was because the contribution the fishermen made. Now, that was the key thing. I don't think they looked at it that way."

AJ: "Do you see that budget increasing in the future? I know that's out of your hands now. Do you think it will continue to increase or does that depend on the trends?"

BT: "Right now it's the trend of the state. Why ASMI started is because of decrease of the value of salmon in Alaska and the legislature trying to figure out what to do so they created ASMI. As a way to revitalize the industry. Now I think that in looking at what's happening to us maybe we have to go back as an industry and say to the legislature we will come back and pay the 1% because the value is so great. Fish to the fishermen and the state of Alaska is so great that we saw what happened this year. The prices were devastating statewide. And, I think, when you cut the budget as much as they did, I think it was 30%, that's huge. You can't afford to do that."

AJ: "What do you feel differentiates Alaska from other seafood industries?"

BT: "From other states, is the conservation. We pay a 3% raw fish tax. Of which 50% goes to municipality of which fish are landed. So Haines gets about 450,000 a year and as low as 200 and something. We also pay another 3% for enhancement so we have the 1% that processors pay. So we really pay 7% of our gross. The difference between us and other states is that WE DO pay to use fish and generate income for the state and the people, the community. That, I think is a big difference. Just the ASMI project alone has been so successful and it's hard to believe that the legislature would cut it any more. I'll be in Juneau and say 'wait a minute people, look what you did in 2 years time.' And it's going to get worse. "

AJ: "As for other reasons Alaska is differentiated, why do you think consumers would want Alaska seafood over other types?"

BT: "They want Alaska seafood because it's wild. Even if it comes from the hatchery they don't stay in the hatchery for long. They're incubated, they're hatched and then they are taken to a site, fed for a month or two to get them to imprint in that area, then they're released and feed naturally, out there in the gulf, or north pacific somewhere."

AJ: What are some of the biggest challenges you see right now in Marketing Alaska seafood?

BT: "Funding. The number one issue would be funding. Without the proper funding, you can't have proper employees marketing fish for us. It is very important that we have that presence elsewhere. We were able to with the extra funding somewhat displace the farmed fish. But now I think we're going to slip backwards because we can't do that and compete. We can with what we have but not as easily done."

AJ: "What do you feel are some of the most important consumers or publics to bring in or get attention from that we don't have right now? Like people that could be buying the product that we don't have right now?"

BT: "I think it will continue to be ASMI. Everyone kind of sits back and watches ASMI. Except for Copper River. They do marketing but they do it for specifically sockeye salmon. At one time there was another group of marketing but nobody in southeast organized that extra marketing because it was probably, to be frank, the people assess themselves and creating another marketing entity for specific fish. Let's say the Wrangell sockeye, chilkoot and chilkat sockeye or specific king salmon. Went to fishery twice and it failed. I think it was because people were trying to put it together. They're so jealous of each other. Putting more money into our pocket, which is pretty much nothing when you look at overall and what fishermen are making off of the resource. It's just jealousy that killed original marketing. Bristol Bay tried a couple of times but I believe they all failed."

AJ: "As far as consumers go, the people that buy Alaska seafood, what do you think their perceptions are about it? Especially those people that aren't from Alaska, what are they thinking when they buy AK seafood?"

BT: "Well I think, regarding the budget beneficial to Wash, Cal, Oregon, that do salmon also, they don't have to compete with us. We used to put so much money in there to market. They just kind of laid back and watched us destroy ourselves because we don't have the money. When I was in legislature I always told my fellow members one thing about taking care of ASMI and marketing is that it's a renewable resource. It's not like oil. You take oil and your campaign to sell oil products...That doesn't come back in 4 years. Salmon comes back in 2,4,5 years. It's renewable. So anything you put into it you're going to get back. You will continue to get back especially when fish are in their premium also."

AJ: "What I think helps Alaska is all the culture, family fishing. Do you think it's important for consumers to know how their food came to them? How does Alaska do this? Is it important to show this in the marketing?"

BT: "Yeah. Growing up everyone was getting told how important it was to have an education and that fishing was looked down upon. A lot of people say they don't want their children to be a fisherman because they have the stigma of being a lower class person. So, they may have decided to get out of the fishing industry, sold off their permits. Things have changed a lot in the communities. But I think eventually, it'll come back. Not everybody is going to go off and go to school. I've seen several kids go off to college and come back and fish again. ASMI does show this culture in marketing. They have different pictures of older and younger people. The main thing is that people see you catching the fish. It's not the big trawlers; there are different sizes of vessels. We have set netters, hand trawlers, bottom trawlers, there are different fishing groups and organizations that harvest resources. Like farmed fish, they never leave the pens, they just sit and then they harvest them. That's the key thing."

AJ: "How is Alaska seafood utilizing the product as far as marketing by-products and co-products?"

BT: "I told Tyson not to be afraid to tell people I helped fund ASMI. It was one specific group in Alaska that got rid of me because of a conflict. This was a statewide thing. They lost 30 or 40% of their income because prices dropped, seiners and gillnetters."

ASMI was the response of the Alaska state legislature fishermen and other concerned groups of the salmon collapse they had in the 70s and 80s. The Legislature created ASMI as a way to get out of it."

Appendix B

Interview Transcripts: Harry Rietz

The following interview was conducted to obtain expert opinions on Alaska seafood from a business standpoint.

Interviewer: Anna Jacobson

Respondent: Owner of Haines Packing Co

(Harry Rietz)

Date of Interview: 11/12/2015

Interview Transcription:

Anna Jacobson: "Who is your primary customer?"

Harry Rietz: "Our primary customer right now would be our Whitehorse Community. The retail market in Whitehorse. We used to sell to Whole Foods, and we still sell to Pacific Seafoods and some other bigger distributors but they pay you wholesale prices so we've been trying to sell more of our products to local markets up here in the state and close to the state and sell it ourselves. So that's why Whitehorse is our biggest market."

AJ: "For promoting your product, what methods do you use?"

HR: "Word of mouth is a big one. We were looking at our accounting and we don't actually spend that much on marketing. A lot of companies designate 5 or 10% of their budget to marketing their products, and we've been lucky in that everything going into the season is kind of already pre-sold. We haven't had to actually do a lot of door knocking and trying to push our product. We pretty much have most of it sold. We haven't really had that problem yet which is good. But I guess what I did first of all to get a couple of our bigger accounts...I just did a lot of cold calling and sent a lot of free samples. Free samples go a long way. So what I did was went through a directory of distributors and grocery store chains and said "Hey, I'd like to send you a box of our seafood, would you be available to pick it up next Thursday or whatever." And sent down a variety. That might have cost me a couple thousand dollars in free samples. But out of those boxes, I landed 2 or 3 big accounts which have carried us through 5 or 6 years. So that was my initial marketing strategies I guess."

AJ: "How would you describe your product as different from other companies?"

HR: "Our product is all caught and processed out of Haines, which is pretty unique in itself. All of our stuff is processed by hand versus a lot of bigger plants its all run

through a machine and mass-produced in a giant plant. So, we have a lot smaller crew and its more meticulous and quality is definitely the top of our priority. Everything is brought in within 24 hours of being caught, and then processed within an additional 24 hours of being brought in. We make sure we handle everything though the process with utmost care. And then, just you know Alaskan products, there's sockeye and other salmon and crab caught off the California, Oregon, Washington coast. But Alaska has that niche for being what people want."

AJ: "When you are selling your product, do you talk about the culture, locally caught? Do you think that helps you sell your product?"

HR: "Yeah, I know we need to do that more. We could create a label, like Copper River salmon created a label and they market it so well and get a premium price for it. We need to start doing that more. But right now what we push is our family owned and operated, based in Haines, Alaska, hire local employees. We're a Small mom and pop store focused on quality. So, that's kind of our push. But we need to sell Haines and the Mountains and the whole cannery scene and that whole thing. That would be the next level when we start making all kinds of labels. That's what we're going to lean towards – making sure people see where the product is coming from and how cool of a location it actually is."

AJ: "Why do you think people enjoy seafood, particularly that of Alaska's as compared to other places?"

HR: "Size-wise for example, the Dungeness crab, the minimum size in Alaska is 6 and a half inch shell on the back of a Dungeness crab. And in Oregon and Washington it's a 5 and a half-inch crab. So inch is a lot, quite a bit smaller of a crab. We generally get bigger, more full crab of here. So. People like that. So that's a big one. Same with the sockeye salmon on the Chilkoot side. We have some of the biggest sockeye salmon anywhere; they're like a 7 lb. average. They're huge. That's make a really big fillet and people like the size. So that would be a big factor I guess is that Alaska produces a bigger species of fish, a bigger product. Just Alaska itself, being pristine. People know that it's a huge producer, everybody kind of looks to Alaska for seafood. It kind of has that niche already."

AJ: "What are some of the biggest challenges of the company?"

HR: "It used to be finding help. Getting local people to come work at a fish plant was kind of hard. Another one is being seasonal. Our water set-up is only about 6 months a year. So, when it freezes we have to drain the water or the pipes will freeze. So, we have start up costs and closing down costs every year. So you may have to make your whole season in months with all those start up and shutdown costs. So that's a struggle for seasonal operation. And then, just staying on top of everything. The cannery is a pretty big place. So there's going on, lots of freezers and buildings to maintain. The dock, the crane, lots of things to keep track of you could say, kind of year round. When the production stops when the season's over you still have to keep an eye on things and make sure they are being maintained. But as far as the

plant and production goes, we're pretty lucky. My dad put in new equipment in 2006, 2007 so when we took over the plant it was all new state-of-the-art stuff and it's pretty up there as far as the quality, what we're running in the plant so that's really helpful."

AJ: "As far as your competitors, are they providing a challenge for you? Or are you finding a niche?"

HR: "Yeah we definitely are finding different niches and it's kind of cool, we are really the only seafood producer in a plant in Haines. I mean Dejon Delights sells seafood too, but they're more of a small gift shop-smoker. And then I guess the nearest competition is Juneau has Alaska Glacier Seafood and Taku but they're way bigger than we are and we are kind of on different sides of Lynn Canal. We are lucky in that sense, is that no one else buys the volume of fish that we do around the Haines area so that's been really helpful in not having someone else to compete with."

AJ: "What misconceptions do you run into with consumers that you have to correct or show them what's actually there?"

HR: "Everybody always says, 'We want fresh seafood.' Fresh seafood is frozen, when you take care of it right and flash-freeze at 30 below zero, and get it cold quick, that's really the best way to handle and freeze a product. If something comes out of the water fresh and you ship it to say, Bozeman, Montana, and it has been out of the water for 6 or 7 days on a truck and gets in case it's still fresh but its quality is not there. Whereas if something comes out of the water and its frozen within 24 hours and you thaw it out it's going to be a way better product than the 'fresh' that's been sitting on the truck for 6-7 days. But people always say, 'where's the fresh stuff?' There's a term in the seafood world called 'fresh-frozen' and if something comes in and its frozen within a day or 2 its really a better quality product."

Appendix C

Interview Transcripts: Tyson Fick

The following interview was conducted to obtain expert opinions on Alaska seafood marketing from someone who works in the industry.

Interviewer: Anna Jacobson

Respondent: Communications Director of Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute
(Tyson Fick)

Date of Interview: 11/16/2015

Interview Transcription:

Anna Jacobson: "What are some strategies you use in differentiating your brand from other seafood brands?"

Tyson Fick: "Well, there's a few things. For one, we talk about how it's wild. That's automatically a differentiation between farmed products and wild, because everything around here is wild. And second, we talk about the place. The origin. In that, seafood is a product of its environment, and Alaskan waters provide some of the best environment that you can imagine. So, those are the two main things. But what we hear about is that people like Alaska seafood because it tastes better. At the end of the day it's about food. So you know with the combination of why it tastes better, because of the clean waters in this awesome place, and the people that take such good care of it all the way to market."

AJ: "How does Alaska culture, fishery methods, and beauty of the area play a role?"

TF: "It plays a huge role. We can go more in depth there. When we talk about sustainability messaging, which is kind of something that has come to be just expected, but for years it was not the case, so we can talk about how sustainability was written into the constitution when we became a state, how fisheries management is a large reason why we're a state at all. And, then the historic track record of very, very impressive results when we really took charge of our fisheries and our own destiny both in statehood and later on in the early 70s when the first Stevens Act limited entry, and all these things that were there to protect the fish and make sure the fish came back. Not just salmon but crab and everything. We got the opportunity to learn from other people's mistakes and have successful fisheries. Beyond that, there's real interest in a marketing angle with places with native culture. You know, that's not the norm around the world at all. So, that is a calling card, a selling point, that supporting these fisheries helps support small, local communities. And helps keep a tradition and connection to the place."

AJ: "Specifically, how do you market the native culture part?"

TF: "Well, there is imagery that gets used in ads, you know particularly Europe. We have spokes fishermen. We have what we do, PR work, Tourism in small communities where a lot of times that's a larger portion of native Alaskans. So we get to know those individuals. Videos, you name it, that's a huge part of who we are."

AJ: "What promotional methods do you use? What previous tactics have you utilized? What recent ones have you implemented?"

TF: "There's a few ways that would work. One is with partners, promotion partners whether its retail chains, food service operators, or chains, or distributors like CISCO or US Foods, or universities where we have certain amount of money that we would kick in. We would also include some imagery so they can build their own ads. Our industry comes in with the product to back it up and they may run a special or demos which is what we did in retail recently. We did demos across the country in spring. You actually have somebody in the store showing how to cook a piece of sockeye salmon and then put it into the case. The store took on a little bit of a price drop to really promote it, and we saw a big boost of sales in volume and total dollars. We did that all over, restaurants when the first halibut and black cod are showing up, maybe they are doing promotions those first few weeks or months, like "hey it's the new season." And a classic example that you see all over is Copper River. That first sockeye salmon shows up and there's promotion at retail, at restaurants. And that's the kind of things that we would set up. We would talk about a summer-long salmon promotion, and that will be the first piece they could take. The other way is through our own paid media. We have a 2 million dollar plus advertising campaign just domestically this year and you'll see some targeted overseas, more so lesser dollar amount may be more targeted, and the outlet whether it's a trade outlet or you know chefs, say, or something like that. So we would do print, online, ads, homepage takeovers. Radio ads, when people are driving home. We would work and promote through our owned media...website, social media channels, which we're active on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest. Kind of the main social media sites that we're using. We have our calendar and we would use that to amplify promotions and also to amplify the earned media, which is all the PR work. Whenever we get a placement in a store, a story, whatever, we would use that for Facebook Content, Twitter, whatever to amplify on the earned media side."

AJ: "Is there anything you guys have tried that hasn't worked in the past that you realized your time was better spent elsewhere? Whether its with social media, or promotions in general."

TF: "I have my own opinion. I think, to me, it would be like hand-to-mouth consumer shows, there's people that have advocated for that, but I don't see the value. I can't imagine that it pays off and people remember who we are. Other than, to go to some of these to maintain the top-level celebrity chef relationships. The real top leaders that keep the PR machine working. It's extremely valuable to us when a chef like John Besh says "Alaska salmon", that's it, that's awesome that's what we need for

good PR. But to hand samples to random people drunk on wine, I don't see how that works."

AJ: "I know recently you guys started doing the cooking shows..."

TF: "It's a few years old now. The first one that I was involved with. But if you go 5 or 6 years ago we had some product in Iron Chef America. But Top Chef was 3 years ago and since then we've really maintained the relationships with the producers. Staying in touch every once in a while, and make sure they remember us if they think they're doing anything seafood related. Like if they're doing tuna or lobsters. But we've supplied them with salmon on the same production crew that does top chef does top chef, the paste, etc. We have supplied fish."

AJ: "Why do you think people enjoy seafood, particularly that of Alaska's?"

TF: "There's a few reasons why people would turn to seafood generally as a category. One of the major ones is health. As people try to eat healthier, seafood definitely steps in there. It's a better alternative to bacon and whatever other protein you've got. Generally if people have a good experience with it because they like the taste, we have a lot of people feeling like they have to choke down medicine merely because it's healthy. All the other parts of the story are contributing factors. What we find it's about health and nutrition and it tastes good, its American and local."

AJ: "What misconceptions do you run into with consumers that you have to work or show them through?"

TF: "One that comes up all the time is contaminant perceived. The mercury myths I would call them. You can't find a case of mercury poisoning because of fish if you do the research. But everyone's afraid of it; they don't want to eat too much seafood because there's mercury in it. But the fact of the matter is, you have absolutely nothing to worry about unless you're eating shark every day all year, which who does that? Its not just mercury, its Fukushima, or arsenic, or whatever. Perceived contaminants present a challenge for us. A way we combat that is science, peer reviewed, here's the facts. So when these stories come up we have something to counter with, in a form of written statement or direct emails, or contact writers who pick up those kinds of stories and try to give them the other side of it. And you know, that's been a pretty successful approach. Another pretty big combater is sustainability issues. We've got environmental groups that are constantly beating the drum that the ocean is horribly overfished and you shouldn't eat seafood, or protect a specific area, or a particular gear type isn't agreeable. Often times they do this without science or telling the whole story which generally, ours is a pretty good one to tell and it's a been a successful collaboration between fisheries and government. You know, our fisheries are what everybody is striving for, but that part gets left out of the story."

AJ: "What are some of your biggest challenges you see in the future?"

TF: "I think ocean acidification is going to be a huge challenge for fisheries and politics. Another is Russian seafood import ban, makes it hard for people to make any kind of profit, which then makes it difficult to have fisheries. These things kind of all play into each other."

AJ: "What are some of the big challenges that ASMI has overcome?"

TF: "The recovery of salmon and the crisis of the early 2000s. This low price is much different than the one we had back in 2002 where we had very low prices plus a relatively very low harvest. Not Multiple years of really high on-scale harvest and the currency value, economic situation. What happened then was really amazing when differentiating markets, creating new markets, really working on product quality improvements, through the technical program with developing care and handling standards all the way through the boat through carriers, ground-shippers, all the way to the chefs and the retailers and programs to make sure no part of that process broke down. So you have that process all the way to the consumer, having easily accessible recipes same for the retail. And seeing products form diversification where less and less salmon was going into a can, and new products were developed so we had salmon burgers, and all sorts of values added to the product. Like Europe used pink salmon in fish fingers. That kind of thing where having all those new products and developing those new markets really was successful in building up the value and stimulating new demand for salmon where we saw a decade of extreme growth. And that effect is that even today after this year, permit values are still up over 250 percent on average in salmon permits across the state to where it was two years ago."

AJ: "In regards to challenges, we see many people going towards a plant-based diet? Do you have any plans about how you're going to combat that?"

TF: "That's a major culinary trend right now. I think seafood and lean protein is still a part of the picture. I think it presents us a real opportunity, especially a premium product, like, say, king crab, to be a part of a larger recipe. It doesn't always have to be "stuff yourself full of crab". It can still be an important part of any plant-based diet. We would hope that works to our advantage. We are currently in a place where Americans eat as little as 15 lbs of seafood a year on average, and over 150 lbs of sugar."

AJ: "What are ways that you are currently strengthening your brand identity and what are you looking to do in the future?"

TF: "We are working through all the channels. I would expect lower budgets and we will see less consumer advertising. I think our money is better spent domestically on PR efforts and familiarization tours. Creating real advocates. We've got members of media that are huge fans and that takes us a long way. Staying on course and sticking to key messages and promises is good, not to be distracted by potential

issues. Dealing with problems like sustainability certifications. There's a real interest to get back to our core marketing efforts."

Appendix D

Interview Transcripts: Lea Ann Holzmeister

The following interview was conducted to obtain expert opinions on health and diet of seafood.

Interviewer: Anna Jacobson

Respondent: Registered Dietician

(Lea Ann Holzmeister)

Date of Interview: 11/17/2015

Interview Transcription:

Anna Jacobson: "What do you recommend to your clients about seafood?"

Lea Ann Holzmeister: "In general, I recommend increasing intake because its actually one of the dietary guidelines and the evidence behind that is that it's a healthier type of protein with lower fat. It has healthier fats in it. So, overall it is just a basic recommendation for people to increase seafood consumption."

AJ: "Can you describe your personal seafood diet?"

LH: "I would say that it's a little bit of a challenge in Arizona because we don't have a lot of fresh seafood, and its also more expensive. But I would say about 2-3 times a week, I include some type of seafood. That's kind of the recommendation of the minimum amount."

AJ: "Where do you purchase it?"

LH: "I usually buy most of my meat and seafood at COSTCO."

AJ: "When you are in a restaurant, how often do you buy seafood?"

LH: "That's usually what I do order, I feel like I get more of a selection. I actually prepared some smoke sockeye salmon cream cheese dip from your dad for this party I'm having."

AJ: "Wow, I'm so jealous, YUM that is awesome. When you are buying seafood, how often do you check to see where it's from?"

LH: "Probably 50% of the time."

AJ: "How important is it to you to know where it comes from?"

LH: "I think its not the most important thing. I think the most important thing is it its fresh. I think that is going to give me the best-cooked product. I guess where it's from is the most important thing."

AJ: "How often do you choose seafood over other meat options like beef or chicken?"

LH: "If I could choose it more often I would, but with the price and availability...but probably if I get to choose it would be more of the time than beef or chicken."

AJ: "Are your friends and coworkers similar in their dietary habits?"

LH: "If you talked to my dietary colleagues, they would all eat at least as much as me or more. I think it has a lot to do with your knowledge of healthy eating. And also, affordability. The thing about seafood and other healthy foods like nuts and fresh fruit, is that there's hardly anything you can say wrong about them, but its how to distribute them and make them affordable so that the consumption goes up."

AJ: "What do you think makes a specific seafood brand desirable? Is there anything that you see that makes you choose one over the other?"

LH: "I guess I don't pay as much attention to that as I should. I look for indicators of freshness overall. Because I buy it at COSTCO, I feel like there's a layer of quality that's built into where I'm buying already. So, I look at sell by dates and also freshness indicators like the smell and the appearance and texture of it. I've written an article about seafood before and done a bit of research before just so people understand how to buy it."

AJ: "Can you tell me more about your article?"

LH: "It's an article I write every other month for a magazine, it's an analysis of different sections of the grocery store. That article was on seafood and it's a little bit about the nutrition and diet, and then an analysis of different kinds of seafood. I prepared a table of all the different seafood and the nutrition composition of them so that people could tell the fat content and cholesterol, nutrients. I have done the same with things like tortilla chips. I took 15 brands of tortilla chips and analyzed them and talked about the different types. My article on seafood was on the fact that it has omega 3 fatty acids, lean protein, those kinds of things."

AJ: "With pregnancy, is seafood popular to eat?"

LH: "Well, based on the mercury content of fish, it isn't highly recommended to pregnant women. And also, if you're breastfeeding or for small children. There is fish that is better for that than others. The fact of it is, is that most people in general don't eat a ton of seafood. The article says, "Mercury can accumulate in fish, in particular large predatory fish at the top of the food chain. Shellfish contains levels of mercury. Young children, women nursing or who may become pregnant should avoid eating any swordfish, shark, or clownfish. They should also limit intake to

twelve ounces or less to seafood lower in mercury like shrimp, salmon, catfish, and tuna. So, a lot of people don't even eat that much."

LH: "I've seen other food industries like some of the berries that have so many positive nutrient profiles...those industries that have tried to market their product more widely and just PR campaigns, and they market, but its making them affordable that can really cut into the consumption. That's the thing: available and affordable, that's the key thing. I think there's a lot of good ways you can freeze fresh fish quickly and make it available and reliable in quality, than trying to have fresh fish in parts of the country available. I think that those types of packaging and distributing attributes...we need more of that. I think that people know that it's healthy and a really good alternative to beef. I don't tell people not to eat beef, but to limit is as much as they can. As people become more educated about health and nutrition, it's just a fact. If you're not going to eat red meat, you need other sources of protein and iron; it is just good nutrition knowledge and how to balance it in your diet."

Appendix E

Interview Transcripts: Alexa Tonkovich

The following interview was conducted to obtain expert opinions on Alaska seafood, and the marketing institute.

Interviewer: Anna Jacobson

Respondent: Executive Director of Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute

(Alexa Tonkovich)

Date of Interview: 11/18/2015

Interview Transcription:

Anna Jacobson: "Can you tell me about your role in ASMI? You are the executive director now."

Alexa Tonkovich: "I've had more or less three jobs at ASMI. I started as an international food corps leader in charge of the Asia market. And thenA couple years ago I was promoted to International Program Director which dealt with promotional marketing in 21 countries, and just recently took over executive director overseeing ASMI international domestic communications PR, technical capability."

AJ: "What's worked in the past and what are you looking to implement with international markets?"

AT: "We have programs in 21 countries, 8 regions. Asia, Europe generally. In most markets we have programs divided up into consumer trade and food service. We sort of target each segment differently. Each market is really different, so there's certain attributes that we promote in every market. Wild, natural, sustainable, healthy eating, good tastes, just different attributes and different communication channels, and different activities work better for some markets versus others. In terms of consumer, we don't have huge budgets for any of our markets so, we do consumer advertising but it can be kind of limited by budget. We do social media, PR tasting type event, try to generate food press. On the trade side, we have a pretty big trade program in most countries, just because a lot of trade education is needed for our product. In terms of food service we do hotel and restaurant promotion, chef work has been pretty effective for us, that's true for domestic market as well. For international marketing, some of our products are high end so developing recipes can work really well. Or, if we are trying to introduce a newer product to the market, you know working with a team of chefs to develop local recipes, or to put it on more menus or to have a special tasting demonstration. It's just a good way to get people to try the product, make chefs try the product. Its more just finding a mix and

knowing your market and knowing what will work and wont, or being flexible enough to say 'well we tried this, now let's try something else.'"

AJ: "When you're marketing to those different countries, who are some of your main competitions?"

AT: "We have many levels of competitors. For wild fish, Russia could be a competitor, as well as Canada definitely. In terms of overall fish, certainly farmed fish is probably one of the biggest types of competition. Norway and Chile, and almost every market of farmed salmon. We are competing against other proteins as well. If someone is buying something for dinner, do they buy chicken, fish, beef, pork? Not that there's anything wrong with other proteins, but many of those groups are very well funded in their marketing. Even competing against say, US beef, which we wouldn't really ever try to go against a US competitor, but just being realistic they have more money than we do. Trying to get more people to eat more seafood is a challenge, and then p trying to get people to pick Alaska once they pick seafood is kind of the next level."

AJ: "Do you think when someone is in a store and they are deciding on a type of seafood to buy, are they educated on Farmed vs. Not Farmed?"

AT: "There's a lot of different things going on there. For one, a lot of consumers don't have a lot of education about their seafood, how its harvested, whether its wild or farmed, where it even comes from, adding on top of that, there's the labeling in grocery stores, and restaurants. I go to restaurants all the time and ask the server if its wild or farmed, and I know enough now that 90% of the time they give me the wrong information. And that's in the US, not China or somewhere, where they are even probably less familiar with Alaska seafood. And then on top of that, some people do prefer farmed seafood. Its hard to explain, especially with marketing to people in Alaska because they think "we have the best seafood in the world, why would you eat anything else?" I get this question all the time with people from Alaska, "Do you really have to promote Alaska seafood?" But yes, yes we do. With sushi restaurants, that's a big way you could get seafood into any country, a lot of chefs prefer to work with farmed fish because it has very consistent size and look and texture, whereas wild salmon can be quite variable. Some people would prefer to work with "fresh", they have a bias against frozen seafood, even though it can be very fresh. People have different preferences, not everybody likes wild fish."

AJ: "With education, what's the role it plays in marketing?"

AT: "Education is a huge part of what we do. A part of promoting something is educating why it matters, why Alaska. In most of our markets, we might be educating the trade, could be retail, process, importers, restaurants, why they should look for Alaska, why their consumers might prefer it, or how to handle the products, when they can buy it, that kind of thing. On the food service side, again, handling, buying frozen products, how to handle and prepare Alaska seafood. In some of the countries working with wild and frozen fish, they can be unfamiliar

things. And, we all know there is nothing better than properly cooked seafood and there is nothing worse than an overcooked, dry fish. That's an important piece of what we do because that is what the consumer thinks. If they go to a restaurant and order Alaska salmon and it's completely overcooked, they are left with that bad impression. So again, consumer education is important at the point of sales, everywhere, where their fish is from, benefit of Alaska seafood. Education is just a theme across everything we do, it has to be...because it is unfamiliar to a lot of people."

AJ: "What are some of your big, upcoming challenges ahead?"

AT: "Right now we are in a pretty challenging time already. We've had pretty big harvests. The farmed supply of salmon is pretty steady, maybe even increasing in some areas. So, trying to get good value for your products in a market that might be oversupplied can be a challenge. Competition is stiff anyway, and then when you have that working against you it can be even harder. Budgeting is certainly a concern. In the state, we are in the middle of budget crisis already, and it can get worse. Knowing that we might be working with decreased budgets is a challenge because I think that all of the markets we are in are very important for different reasons. We are competing with other seafood and other proteins that might already be very very very well funded. So if we lose our funding we still have that competition. There's geopolitical and global challenges. Currency is a challenge, that may be short-term, but with the dollar being strong, that impacts overseas. Challenge of losing Russia was a big market for us. I'd say those are the immediate challenges. Thinking longer term, there will continue to be more competition, and differentiating our brand is always a challenge, and staying current with brand attributes that we call out and the channels we use to market them, we have to constantly be adapting that. How those change, and how our competition changes, and they are all adapting their strategies, so we have to be flexible as well. I think for the industry continuing to diversify the market we are in is very important. We have a lot of products that are overly dependent on one market. Japan is a pretty good example of that. They are really dependent on the Japan market, and if we don't continue to diversify where we offer our products, if we have market crashes, it is a tragedy for many of our segments of the industry. I'd say being diverse in our strategy and in our markets is a long-term challenge."

AJ: "When you were talking about differentiating your brand, what are some main things you guys focus on?"

AT: "Wild, natural, sustainable is our tagline. That's sort of the baseline where we started. But, you know, that can even be a challenge. There are other products that are natural, there are other products that are wild, there are other products that are sustainable. I think one of the things we have that no one else has is the Alaska story, and that seems to resonate pretty well with people. You know, the nature, fishing families, generations of Alaskans fishing, the fact that fishing is important to our native Alaska culture. I think that's probably the most unique thing. There are other places that have something, but I think that's one of our big opportunities. We have

to sort of be flexible and see where markets are going. Health is a really big concern in almost every country. You know, healthy eating and nutrition and we've adapted some of our marketing materials more to target healthy eating, light recipes, targeting athletes, that kind of thing. There's several points and it really depends on the market and it kind of has to keep developing. The Alaska story really helps with that. Any time we've brought anyone to Alaska, they are just blown away. Unfortunately we can't do that for everybody, but any opportunity to tell that story it does seem to work well. No one can ever quite copy us."

Appendix F

Interview Transcripts: Mary Verdin

The following interview was conducted to obtain expert opinions on marketing and branding.

Interviewer: Anna Jacobson

Respondent: President of Verdin

(Mary Verdin)

Date of Interview: 11/18/2015

Interview Transcription:

Anna Jacobson: "What are some strategies that Verdin uses with brand differentiation?"

Mary Verdin: "First thing, typically we do, we have a whole intake process that we use when we have a new client. Whether we are doing branding or not, because even if somebody comes to us and says we have a logo, we have our website, we just need an ad. Well how do we do an ad if we don't know understand who you are or how you're different. So we still go back to the intake session. We always do a SWOT Analysis, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats. And then it helps the client because they typically know their product so well it's hard for them to see it, but it helps all of that, they can ask questions. Typically what happens during that discussion is they tell us who they are, what they do. They will talk about that, and we will see things, like you do this that nobody else does that, or they invented some certain process... So we will help them add things that maybe they didn't realize. We are big proponents in research. Everything we do is based in strategy. Our first core value is integrity, our second is strategy. So, if customers can be surveyed, or a focus group we can pull together, or existing research from a trade association we can look at...anything like that is going to help round out those pieces about the industry and specifically about them. We have a process that I won't go into because it's proprietary. But it's an exercise that we always do and they think, "okay these crazy marketing people" but it makes them think about their brand in a different way. And it never fails. Never ever ever. Governmental agencies, nonprofit, everybody does an awesome job with this exercise. I think looking at the competitive landscape is really important. The example I always give is that even if its not a differentiating factor, nobody else is talking about it. Maybe with seafood, I think of salmon and I think of "which one has mercury and which one doesn't? Is it sustainable fishing?" all of those things that are important. Now, maybe because of regulation, I don't know the industry but, maybe because of regulation, all salmon fishing is now sustainable. But, I don't know that as a consumer, but if you're the first one to tell me, I'm going to

hang with them. I'm going to buy their product. I remember everybody wanted fat free, they didn't care about calories, salt, any of that, it just had to be fat free. So pretzels, which have never had fat in them put really big on their bag "100% fat free" you know, something that the pretzel market wouldn't miss. And the other pretzel companies were like "oh man, our pretzels are fat free too, pretzels are fat free." But they didn't say it, and totally missed it. So, that's a big part of it too, and that's an important role for the marketing person to come in, because that's that outside perspective that somebody inside knows it too well and it's hard to understand."

AJ: "What specific things do you look at in a company when you're trying to differentiate them as far as culture, area, people, and methods? Is there anything specific that you notice they miss?"

MV: "A lot of times they miss things just in explaining who they are. Roll's Royce was a client and they're trying to figure out how do you get people to understand what it's like to ride in a Roll's Royce. This is not like riding in any other car. The author is reading the technical implications, and he finds the clock that makes a sound. "The engine is so quiet you can hear the clock ticking"-genius. And he got that from just understanding the product, just reading...there's got to be something in here that I can pull out that differentiates in the market. So I think that having creatability is important, but really, understanding the product."

AJ: "Have you ever worked with food companies in the past?"

MV: "Restaurants."

AJ: "How do you help food companies differentiate one restaurant from another?"

MV: "We do a lot of tourism marketing and I think similar things apply. Don't try to be something you're not. One of our clients is a cantina. They are a higher end Mexican restaurant. They are not Taco Loca, they are a little more expensive, but still a Mexican restaurant. They are not white tablecloths and crystal. So we have to make sure we are talking to that right audience. So, it's the culture of the experience. Everybody talks about the experience. So, if you're talking about fish, its not about, "so here's a fish" It's about that great party you're going to have with your friends coming over and in your head you start being the person with the grilled salmon and bottles...Everybody is after the experience, it can be a romantic experience, a family-friendly making memories experience, it can be reconnecting with an old friend experience. It can be a lot of different experiences, there's no right one, but you have to understand what's authentic to that product."

AJ: "What are some examples of companies who really stand out in successfully differentiating their brands?"

MV: "First, let me tell you how we always describe "brand". For a while, I wouldn't use the word because it became this buzzword. People were using the word without knowing what it meant. People were saying "Oh, look at my logo, I'm branding" Well, the logo is representation, its not branding. The brand is everything. We always say

three things. First of all, the brand needs to be recognizable. If you have a logo, you use it consistently, use the same colors, and fonts. Those are things that some people might not notice specifically, but they will know something is different. It's that consistency. The brand can control that. The second thing is what do you promise. This is when advertising and marketing comes into play. So I have an ad and I'm going to tell you on Tuesday you can get this, you know what I'm promising that's controllable too. What you can't control, which is the most important thing about branding, is that the brand delivers. That's my experience with you. I always use Fed Ex as an example. If they tell me that delivery is going to be next day, but every time I use them it takes a couple of days, they can spend millions of dollars they're going to deliver but I'm not going to believe them because that's not my experience. So it's that whole thing, the experience, delivering on a promise, being consistent, all of those things make a brand. So the one I always like to use is Apple. They cost more, but I know it's going to be user-friendly. I get some new apple thing and the package even feels innovative, user-friendly, it's the latest thing. So I think that's an example of really good branding. Cayucos and Morro Bay are good examples. They are 15 minutes apart, on the highway, both coastal communities, but they are completely different, and they target people differently. Cayucos is kids, on the beach, bring your dog, very family friendly, very down to earth kind of hang out. Morro Bay is much more of a fishing village kind of feel, there's kayaking. So, it's targeting those people correctly. Who are you talking to and what is that message to get to those people."

AJ: "What is the number one error you see companies making when they are trying to differentiate themselves?"

MV: "Everything is about authenticity now. Social media really changed things. It is not a one-way conversation anymore, it's a two-way conversation. A city shouldn't lie about who they are, but they should promote what they have. Closeness for example, is what differentiates them. "We are in the middle of all this stuff, super safe." I think the other thing is not being strategic about things. Social media has become a very important piece of marketing. I think that it's hard to define. You can't be sales-y on social media, Facebook has changed a lot, if you have any verbage that sounds promotional, they will deflect that and it won't show up on the News Feed. Unless its an ad. You can buy ads because it's a public company and they need to raise money. So, understanding social media, I think that's a huge error. They think, oh I have a Facebook page, I know how to do that. They are inconsistent with their posts, there's no strategy behind their posts. They think, oh it's 2 o'clock, I need something to post, I'll say something about how it's cold out today. No. Does that work? No. If there is no strategic reason of why you're saying that you are wasting time and losing followers. So I think social media needs understanding. And technology changes all the time, people always ask what the biggest challenges of technology are. But, marketing is still the same. It's the right people, and the right message, at the right time. I think people discount social media because of the two-way relationship. There's so much you can do with fishing industry, seafood, recipes. I don't remember if its Atlantic or Pacific salmon that's good. Pacific. I don't like the

idea of farmed. There's so many things that could raise people's awareness about it. Tell them to not put any dye in it, is that the farmed fish thing? I hate it when it says color added, I will never buy it."