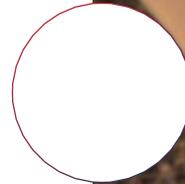
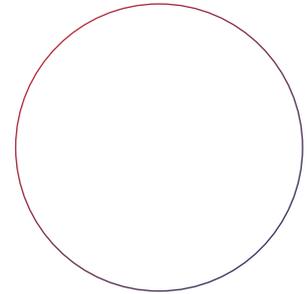




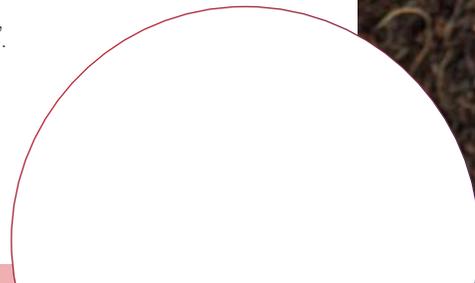
elevationmarketing



Mercaris

CASE STUDY

Elevation Marketing executes a PR strategy that garners \$2.3M in ad spend equivalency, gains exposure to 260M online viewers and raises sentiment rating to 'highly positive'.





BACKGROUND

Market data and auctions that help grow organic and non-GMO agriculture in the U.S.

With the development of sustainable agriculture crops at a critical point, Mercaris was formed in 2013 to address gaps in the market infrastructure on which industry participants — growers, mills, elevators, retailers and more — depend.

The company developed Mercaris Data Service to provide up-to-date, accurate information on market conditions for organic, non-GMO and other identity-preserved commodities. It supplies data on sales, price and volume, statistics on industry infrastructure, and information on marketing practices, production contracts and elevators and transport/distribution capacity, all of which is used extensively in the industry for planning and decision-making purposes.

Mercaris also built a trading platform that allows commodities brokers, buyers and sellers to trade physical commodities in real time through online auctions — an industry first. The trading platform is groundbreaking in its focus on the previously unserved food and fiber crops that utilize certified organic production processes, non-genetically engineered inputs and other specialized traits.

The Mercaris Market Survey™ is widely referenced as well. Using data supplied by Mercaris, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service and the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, the survey supplies the most comprehensive and largest organic and non-GMO data set available. More than 60 first handler facilities participate, representing 8 percent to 12 percent of the total domestic organic and non-GMO market.



CHALLENGE

Mercaris needed a comprehensive strategy backed by market and company research to increase brand awareness and generate more leads

The sustainable agriculture market Mercaris serves was growing rapidly, but the revenue was not keeping pace. **Few organic growers, ingredient purchasers or others in the organic market were aware that the type of technology and data Mercaris provides was available to them, even though it had been commonly used in the non-organic market.** Although Mercaris' close rate was nearly 30 percent — they were getting quality leads — their rate of growth relative to the market indicated they needed more leads and more top-of-funnel activities.

Mercaris engaged Elevation Marketing to conduct in-depth market and competitive research, then recommend an approach that would differentiate it from competitors entering the space, improve brand awareness and attract prospective customers.

“OUR CLOSE RATES WERE QUITE HIGH, SO WE KNEW OUR PRODUCTS WERE BEING RECEIVED WELL. However, the market was growing fast and our lead generation wasn't keeping pace. We needed to raise awareness of all that Mercaris has to offer.”

– Lizzie Ekeberg, Director of Market Operations

STRATEGY

Establish Mercaris as the industry thought leader to raise its profile and grow market share

Elevation Marketing conducted in-depth market and competitive research, and examined market position and the media landscape, to inform its guidance on future marketing strategies. The extensive research was done in three phases:

PHASE 1: DISCOVERY MARKET RESEARCH AND MEDIA AUDIT

The first phase centered on understanding company and industry dynamics as well as competitor tactics in the B2B space. Elevation researched the positioning of Mercaris' organic market online trading platform and pricing data and volume reports, as well as its competitors' offerings. Elevation also sought to understand how Mercaris was positioning itself via public relations and determine whether that resonated with customers and positively differentiated the company from its competitors. All significant articles published over the course of a year across relevant industries were reviewed to uncover the state of the media landscape and determine volume, sentiment and common themes.

PHASE 2: VALIDATION COMPANY AND CUSTOMER INTERVIEWS

To better understand company positioning vs. market perception, Elevation conducted eight in-depth interviews — four with Mercaris employees representing member relations, sales, market operations and business development, and four with customers, including a grower, merchandiser, broker and analyst. Through the interviews, we found that Mercaris' offerings were priced right and that they were the go-to resource for research on the organic market, with customers using words such as “trusted,” “transparent” and “accurate” to describe them — a great place to start.

PHASE 3: EVALUATION BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Based on the data collected and analyzed during the first three phases, Elevation determined that Mercaris was the category leader. From growers to food manufacturers to government agencies, all those operating in the sustainable agriculture space depended on the company's offerings to some extent. That was a good starting point for Mercaris, as industry-related trends were a hot topic across vertical markets. However, the research also revealed that industry messaging was not lining up with customer priorities. Differentiating Mercaris' advantages in a way that resonated with customers was a priority.



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND PR STRATEGIES TAKE SHAPE

Research unearthed 390,000 articles on topics related to market intelligence and trade for sustainable agriculture. However, it also revealed that there was a lack of leadership from subject matter experts and an opportunity to shape the conversation in the market. Establishing Mercaris as a thought leader would be essential in raising its profile and growing market share in the niche market of organic crops — a niche overshadowed by the much larger traditional agricultural market.

The media audit also showed that coverage peaked momentarily then dwindled quickly despite interest in the topic and the prominence of several trade publications. Sentiment was largely lackluster at 83 percent neutral. Mercaris needed to join the conversation more frequently by executing a strategic public relations plan to move the sentiment needle to positive and increase its share of voice, which was dominated by competitors.



DELIVERABLES

- PR strategy and execution plan
- Social media optimization plan
- Trend data and analysis
- Internal and external interviews
- In-depth research report
- Stakeholder validation



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“When we attend trade shows and conventions now, people already know who we are. That means **WE CAN SPEND OUR TIME TALKING WITH PROSPECTIVE CUSTOMERS ABOUT SOLUTIONS THAT ARE MEANINGFUL TO THEM**, not explaining the company. It’s made a huge difference in our ability to attract leads and turn those leads into **Mercaris customers.**”

– Alex Heilman, Director of Sales

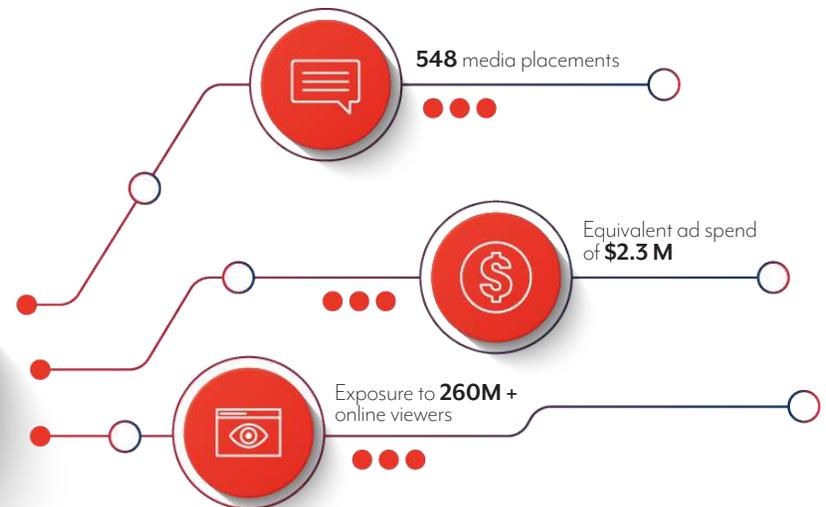


RESULTS

Elevation's Thought Leadership and PR strategies dramatically increased brand awareness and top-of-funnel opportunities

Elevation built Mercaris a 12-month public relations program centered on the company's expertise and culture of innovation. Commentary on industry trends across the vertical markets it served began to establish Mercaris' role as national thought leader in sustainable agriculture. Elevation also evaluated key publications to determine the optimal editorial calendar to target with a steady stream of Mercaris news and insights, including market highlights gleaned from the company's proprietary data and the Mercaris Market Survey. To make the most of every secured article, Elevation recommended the integration of Mercaris' earned media program (public relations) with its owned and paid programs, encouraging the company to share coverage with its audience through its website and social media accounts and push big hits through a paid media program to reach prospective customers. Further recommendations included optimizing Mercaris' Twitter and Facebook presence, guest posting on relevant sites to augment link building, establishing a monthly social calendar and developing compelling content pieces to feed it.

In the first 10 months, Mercaris earned 548 media placements through press releases and unique media mentions, resulting in an equivalent ad spend of \$2.3 million. The company has gained exposure to more than 260 million online viewers with highly positive to neutral sentiment. With the help of online media mentions, referring domains and referring pages, website metrics continue to increase.



ABOUT ELEVATION

Elevation Marketing is a full-service B2B marketing agency, providing exceptional client experiences that result in more business wins. We go beyond tactics to inspire experiences that build brand believers. From a holistic perspective, we focus on all aspects of operations and strategy to ensure alignment between marketing and sales.

We have a strong command of inbound marketing, and know how to effectively manage, deliver and retain buyers. We offer full-cycle web development services for the enterprise. We build bridges of communication, streamlining the dissemination of information to targeted entities.

Whether its partner portals, online stores, web apps or microsites, our custom digital solutions help you govern personal data through its entire lifecycle for superior lead generation and nurturing.

If you have a B2B product or service that solves real-world problems, then you've done your job. We'll do ours by connecting you to the B2B decision makers that will benefit from what you have to offer.



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