

# Johnsonville Creates New Holiday at Meijer

'Bratsgiving' program expands with unique events, signage package and digital activity

By Samantha Nelson

SHEBOYGAN FALLS, WIS. — Sausage is an extremely seasonal product, with sales spiking around summer holidays such as Memorial Day and Father's Day. **Johnsonville Sausage** saw an opportunity to create a new occasion to lift sales in August, when there's a lull between the Fourth of July and Labor Day. "We've seen if you give brat lovers a reason to celebrate, they will," says Stephanie Plehn, Johnsonville shopper marketing manager for the Central Region.

The manufacturer used the designation of Aug. 16 as "National Bratwurst Day" to launch a digital "12 Days of Bratsgiving" campaign in 2014. Digital and in-store activity at retailers such as **Albertsons Cos.** Safeway promoted the holiday again in 2015 and created a 16% lift in sales nationally. For 2016, Johnsonville stepped up its activity to reach retailers earlier and make the campaign work for their timelines.

The company found a particularly receptive partner in **Meijer**. Johnsonville gave Meijer a Bratsgiving deal for its mPerks coupon program in 2015 and reached out to the Midwestern mass merchant in March 2016

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with an eye on a bigger execution for that August. Meijer wanted to build awareness of its Curbside pickup program, so Johnsonville conducted curbside cookouts in six markets with agency **IN Marketing**, Norwalk, Connecticut, during which shoppers picking up their click-and-collect orders were rewarded with brat samples, coupons, swag including can koozies and T-shirts, and giveaways for larger prizes such as a gas grill and chairs.

In-store announcements alerted shoppers, and Johnsonville worked with Meijer and ad agency **Mediavest-Spark**, Chicago, to enlist local radio stations for remote broadcasts at the events, which produced impulse trips.

"It was a nice little fun, surprising delight," says Crystal Stowe, Meijer senior marketing specialist – vendor partnerships dairy, fresh and frozen. "Utilizing curbside was just another customer touchpoint. There were people from [Grand Traverse Bay in northern Michigan] and all of the water sports, and they were hearing the radio and they just stopped by."

The 360-degree activation at Meijer kicked off with a brand showcase running on Meijer.com from July 24 to Aug. 20 that included video, banner ads, links to recipes and offers through the mPerks program. That activity earned Johnsonville coveted in-store space in the form of magnetic headers and signs placed on cooler bunkers that could be seen from 40 feet away. "It was a pretty

Johnsonville's campaign included highly visible signage on cooler bunkers and curbside cookouts.

unique in-store signage package, and I've had a lot of vendors come to me since looking to replicate it," Stowe says.

While Johnsonville also ran the Bratsgiving program at several regional supermarket chains, Meijer had the only true omnichannel activation. "This is the most complete execution, and it was a little bit more pushing the envelope for Meijer," Plehn says. "The fact that we were able to put up in-store signage, we feel like we proved something. They have made comments that there has to be more to it than the signage. I think we set a precedent."

The results were impressive. Sales grew by 11% on grilling items during 2016 over the average for that same period in 2014 and 2015, with the point-of-sale execution driving growth. The first week of Bratsgiving at Meijer saw more Johnsonville incremental dollar sales in 2016 than the brand experi-

enced during Labor Day or Father's Day. The brand plans to return to Meijer in 2017, this time using the "Carl the Great Bratsgiver" character that **Droga5**, New York, created for Johnsonville's 2016 national Bratsgiving campaign.

"We essentially created another holiday," Plehn says. **SM**



**BRAND:** Johnsonville

**RETAILER:** Meijer

**KEY INSIGHTS:** Sausage tends to be a seasonal product, with sales spiking during the summer holidays. There was an extended lull between the Fourth of July and Labor Day.

**ACTIVATION:** Building on 2014 and 2015 successes, Johnsonville stepped up its "Bratsgiving" activity in partnership with Meijer, staging curbside cookouts in six markets as part of a 360-degree activation that produced impressive results.