

nofrills

marketing case study

about nofrills

a canadian discount grocery store

No Frills is a Canadian grocery store, owned by Loblaw Companies Limited. There are over 200 No Frills stores located in nine provinces throughout the country.

No Frills was founded in 1978 as a discount grocery store, providing price cuts in return for a bare-bones retail experience. The first store opened in Toronto's East York, offering only 500 products and with nothing more to the shopping experience than the food - there was no advertising or displays, no clerks, no bags, or no meat counter¹. The company held true to its name from its outset.

Perhaps nothing identifies No Frills as much as their line of generic-branded products, aptly named no name. Anyone can pick out the iconic black Helvetica lower-case font against a yellow background, with the literal name of the product, like coffee, meat, soup, dog food, and even beer.

¹ <https://www.nofrills.ca/about>

the issue

a question to be considered, solved, or answered

Historically, No Frills had been ahead of the curve in terms of grocery store innovation, as it pioneered the discount store in Canada, introduced its iconic no name generic brand, and advertised in flyers before it was the norm¹.

However, No Frills found itself facing steep competition within the Canadian grocery chain industry, as well as from the increase of American stores in Canada, such as Walmart and Costco.²

It was clear that a change was needed in order for No Frills to stay competitive. In 2017, Loblaws recognized this need, and focused their efforts on promoting No Frills to increase their competitive edge in the discount grocery store realm.³

Understanding the necessity to, once again, take an innovative approach to differentiate itself within the market, Loblaw Companies Limited contracted John St.'s marketing expertise to launch a marketing campaign that would once again bring No Frills to a top spot in the Canadian grocery store scene.

1 <http://strategyonline.ca/2018/11/16/no-frills-the-discount-grocer-with-swagger/>

2 *ibid.*

3 <http://strategyonline.ca/2019/05/15/how-no-frills-aims-to-keep-up-the-momentum-of-haulers/>

aha moment

a moment of sudden realization

When No Frills and John St. joined forces, the pair knew that No Frills needed to harken back to the original reason for their success. The team quickly came to the realization that No Frills needed to lean into their identity of frugality¹.

No Frills had consistently valued saving money, and they acknowledged that there was no need to discount that in favour of competing with more upscale chains. No Frills didn't need a rebrand, they needed a savvy marketing campaign to tell the public what they already knew - saving money should be celebrated, not shamed.

John St. was the perfect partner to make this notion a reality.

¹ <https://www.johnst.com/en/work/no-frills-get-the-frill-out-of-your-grocery-bill>

strategy

a careful plan or method

In order to solidify their brand and catch up to their competition, John St. worked with No Frills to attract new customers to their stores. Who better to target than young millennials and older Gen-Z's, who are just starting to shop for their own groceries, and a majority of whom face financial uncertainty and insecurity.

John St. knew that in order to reach this demographic, they would have to implement some unconventional marketing techniques. John St. has now worked with No Frills on two different national marketing campaigns: “Get the frill out of your bill” in 2017, and “Haulers” in 2018.

The “Get the frill out of your bill” campaign, No Frills’ first in six years, included a TV spot along with radio and social media advertisements¹. This campaign called out the no-frills shopping experience, and stressed that the key factor of a good grocery store is having good products at the best prices.

The second campaign, “Haulers” puts the emphasis on No Frills’ customers, and celebrates their passion for a good deal. The campaign includes a 90-second spot that honours these “haulers”, along with print and social media advertisements, and even a store that sells limited edition “Hauler” T-shirts.²

To go along with the “Haulers” campaign, John St. teamed with Relish Interactive to create an arcade-style 8-bit video game, “Hauler: Aisles of Glory”, which simulates a shopping trip at No Frills for a chance to win PC Optimum points.³

1 <http://www.canadiangrocer.com/top-stories/no-frills-tells-shoppers-to-get-the-frill-out-of-their-bill-72665>

2 <http://strategyonline.ca/2018/05/16/no-frills-finds-pride-in-being-a-hauler/>

3 <http://strategyonline.ca/2018/05/16/no-frills-finds-pride-in-being-a-hauler/>

**GET THE
FRILL OUT
OF YOUR
BILL.**





results

a beneficial or tangible effect

Both of these campaigns quickly saw an increase in customer engagement and sales.

The 2017 “Get the frill out of your bill” campaign resulted in a **12% sales growth for No Frills**, versus the year prior.¹ Furthermore, **Loblaw Companies Limited reported a 1.9% growth in the first quarter** of 2018, after the “Get the frill out of your bill” campaign was implemented.²

The “Get the frill out of your bill” campaign took home a **Silver at the 2018 Strategy Awards**, where it was celebrated for its ability to make discount shopping smart and desirable³. Additionally, it resulted in a substantial **rise in social engagement, with an increase by 91%** compared to the previous quarter⁴.

Although the “Hauler” campaign is ongoing, the success cannot be denied as the Youtube video has already collected **1.4 million views**.

1 <https://www.johnst.com/en/work/no-frills-get-the-frill-out-of-your-grocery-bill>

2 <http://strategyonline.ca/2018/11/16/no-frills-the-discount-grocer-with-swagger/>

3 <https://awards.strategyonline.ca/winners/winner/2018/?e=63667&w=Get+The+Frill+Out+of+Your+Bill>

4 *ibid.*

conclusion

a reasoned judgement

There are two important lessons to draw from John St.'s work on No Frills' marketing campaigns.

Firstly, it is imperative to take big risks to stay innovative and differentiate the brand from the competition. No Frills had done virtually no advertising beyond flyers before 2017. John St.'s two campaigns represented a significant departure from their previous marketing strategy. That risk paid off in a big way, both in terms of sales growth and brand perception.

Secondly, this pay-off was only possible because the marketing campaign tapped into what No Frills already had, and leaned into the "saving money" aspect of their brand.