



CHRISTMAS TREE PROMOTION BOARD
ANNUAL REPORT
2021



WWW.ITS CHRISTMAS KEEP IT REAL.COM



Campaign 2021

Another fast-paced campaign season is in the books for the Christmas tree industry and the CTPB.

Media Outreach – For the 2021 campaign, the CTPB introduced the Newsroom; the hub for communicating with the media and the feature story *“The Year of the Switch”*. This highlights the key learnings from our consumer survey that *89% of people who previously bought artificial Christmas trees and switched to a real one last year wish they had done so sooner*. This story was supported by video interviews of real customers discussing their real Christmas tree switch experiences.

However, things started early in the Newsroom with stories regarding tree supply and weather issues. The CTPB provided press releases, direct media outreach and interviews addressing the supply of real Christmas trees. This was

supported by an Audio Press Release as well as FAQ sheets on popular Christmas tree topics and a library of b roll video and still photos for the media to use.

The CTPB was also sought out for media interviews and provided media training and prep sessions for industry members before key interviews.

In total, CTPB press releases, audio news release, interviews and quotes garnered 3,166 story placements and more than 717 million impressions.

CTPB media outreach was also expanded with a lighthearted feature on BuzzFeed, a popular digital media outlet. The BuzzFeed partnership

...the CTPB introduced the Newsroom; the hub for communicating with the media and the feature story “The Year of the Switch”.

included the preparation of two on-line pieces; one seeking consumer input on their real Christmas tree experiences and the second a compilation of some of the favorite responses. The BuzzFeed partnership delivered nearly 1.9 million impressions.

“Year of the Switch” Participants



WWW.CHRISTMASTREEPROMOTIONBOARD.ORG/PROMOTION/

Dude Dad and The Holderness Family Spread the Real Christmas Tree Message

– The CTPB secured a contract with Taylor Calmus, aka: “Dude Dad”; a top social media influencer. Dude Dad is known for his funny and irreverent take on parenting, home repair and everyday family life. His videos are viewed hundreds of thousands of times – some exceed a million views! Best of all, he is a real Christmas tree fan, so agreeing to work with the CTPB was an easy “yes” for Taylor. He and his team created a video that delivered big on an over-the-top Christmas tree experience while embracing the warmth of family holiday fun.

The Dude Dad segment was aired on his Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and TikTok channels delivering more than 950,000 impressions and 356,000 video views.



Taylor Calmus, aka: “Dude Dad”



The Holderness Family, Penn and Kim

And in case that wasn’t enough Christmas spirit, The Holderness Family was also on board! Penn and Kim Holderness are practically royalty in the family-humor influencer realm. They created a video and song specifically for the *It’s Christmas. Keep it Real* campaign and shared it on their YouTube, Facebook and Instagram channels. This video delivered a reach of more than 1 million and was viewed more than 283,000 times.

The popularity of these two influencers is evidenced by Kim and Penn Holderness recently appearing on (and WINNING) CBS’s *The Amazing Race* and Taylor headlining his own show, “*Super Dad*” on the Magnolia network.



Free E-Card Greetings – Also featured on the website was a series of free e-cards (we like to refer to them as “Tree-Mail”). These were available at no charge for consumers to share with their family and friends and were intended as a “thank you” that Christmas tree retailers could offer their customers. Unfortunately, the development of the cards was delayed. Although they were available on the website, we had little time to communicate their availability to retailers and the service was not widely utilized.

Spanish Translation – In an effort to reach the important Hispanic market, we translated several key pages of the website into Spanish and also used Spanish language versions of banner ads and social media posts. This effort will be expanded in upcoming years.



Campaign 2021



Satellite Media Tour – Two days before Thanksgiving, Ashley Ahl, a third-generation Christmas tree producer was joined by Taylor Calmus for our annual satellite media tour in Fort Collins, Colorado. They tackled 28 live interviews airing in top media markets across the US. In total, these interviews netted out 1,356 television and radio placements with a total reach exceeding 14 million. This was the most successful satellite media tour yet for the CTPB.

Website and Consumer Engagement – In 2020, the CTPB invested heavily in the consumer website; www.itschristmaskeepitreal.com, as the permanent home for our messaging and consumer tools. In 2021, we improved the functionality of the site and added significant content featuring topics that consumers are searching for during the season. Here are some key updates:

Retail Locator – We significantly increased the speed and ease of use for consumers looking for a location to purchase a real Christmas tree. We employed a variety of outreach tools to increase the number of retail locations featured, including email, physical mail, ads in trade journals and outreach through wholesale producers and industry suppliers. The strength of the locator lies in the detailed information provided by the

retailer to ensure accuracy as well as the ability for retailers to request a “closed for the season” message to be displayed and thus limit consumer disappointment.

The annual campaign summary video is currently posted on the CTPB industry website and all industry members are urged to take a few minutes to see all that was accomplished for the benefit of the industry. Please visit www.christmas-treepromotionboard.org and click on the Promotion tab to view the video.

Content Guides and Infographics – Seven new guides were added to the website in 2021 that provided high quality content based on the most popular topics of the season including; tree stands, how to make your tree last, recycling and more. These guides combined to collect 164,000 website page views and on average, people stayed on those pages for nearly 3 minutes.

We also created five printable infographics to accompany these pages that were downloaded more than 2,500 times.

Paid Search – To drive consumers to the website, significant budget was dedicated to paid search. On Google, we produced 119 *banner ads* with photos to lead people directly to key features on the website (tree guide, retail locator, etc.). These banners were shown 12 million times and clicked 31,000 times. *Search ads* were grouped into 11 topics. The highest interacting topics were for tree care, tree stands and tree decorations. In total, search ads were shown 891,000 times and clicked 108,000 times. Combined paid search and banner ads drove 70% of website traffic.

Original Video Content – A series of videos was produced to tell the story of the Converts; those who switched from artificial to real Christmas trees in 2020. These are real customers sharing their actual experiences. This video series supported our “Year of the Switch” story and provided interesting insights to how real Christmas tree converts enjoyed the experience of celebrating with a natural tree.

Social Media – The campaign continued its production of funny, clever and heartwarming content for Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Pinterest. We even dabbled in Reddit. We also shared our Convert videos, as well as the Dude Dad and Holderness Family videos.

Trees for Troops – And we can’t forget about the CTPB sponsorship of the Christmas Spirit Foundation’s Trees for Troops campaign. CTPB proudly continued its annual sponsorship of this important industry project.



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Consumer Research

CTPB's annual consumer survey conducted by TRUE Global Intelligence surveyed 1,502 consumers. The firm also conducted a three-day discussion board with 29 "converts" – people who had previously displayed artificial trees but made the switch to real trees in 2020.

"We really wanted to look at people who made the switch from artificial to real trees last year and see if they'll stick with real trees again this year," said Liz Conant of FleishmanHillard.

This mix of qualitative and quantitative data allows researchers to "dig a lot deeper and add color to the statistics," explained Monica Nolasco, Senior Research Manager at TRUE Global Intelligence. "It's a new way of doing a focus group."

Survey finding

Messages around smell, ambience and the real tree experience were popular among the survey respondents, all of whom were between the ages of 21 and 49, either observe or celebrate Christmas, and have household purchasing power. A few top takeaways include:

- 97% of respondents who previously displayed artificial trees and switched to real during the pandemic reported that they enjoyed having a real tree in their home. And 89% said they wish they had done it sooner.

- Four out of five people who are planning to put up a real tree this year say they will continue the tradition every year.
- The "real tree experience" motivated 88% of those who converted to real from artificial during the pandemic to say they're more likely to get a real tree again this year.
"Owning a real tree is an experience," Nolasco explained. "There's no tradition around going to the store to buy an artificial tree."
- Of the respondents planning to buy a real tree this year, 54% point to its scent and the experience of decorating it as a favorite part of owning a real tree.

One area of messaging that didn't resonate as strongly with respondents as it did in the past was environmental messaging. The message of artificial trees having "three times the amount of impact on climate change" dropped in motivation by five points compared to 2018 results. But a message that for each tree harvested a new one is planted proved to be more motivating over 2018 and increased by two points.

Through the discussion board, Nolasco was able to glean more insights. For example, some respondents didn't believe artificial trees were bad for the environment because they can be used over and over again. Others have the perception that Christmas trees can only grow in forests and cutting one down has to damage the environment.

The discussion board

The 29 consumers who participated in the discussion board put up a real tree in 2020 after previously opting for either artificial trees or no tree at all.

"We wanted to pick the brains of the converts," Nolasco said. "They really are the group that we want to capture in the coming years. They made a big switch last year, and we want to understand why that is and how we can make that a tradition. And for those who are reverting back to artificial, we also want to understand why."

The key takeaways from the discussion board include:

- Unprompted, converts are likely to associate real trees with emotional benefits like "joy" or "nostalgia" while artificial trees are associated with practical benefits like "convenient."
- Those who plan to put up a real tree again are driven by a desire to continue last year's tradition.

- Offering resources during the buying process – like tips for how to recycle the tree after the season or assistance in tying trees to cars – can alleviate the deterrents to buying a real tree.
- Real trees have an advantage over artificial in that getting one is an experience, which helps to justify the cost.
- Converts can agree that buying a real tree is "worth it."

"One message we want to explore further is that real Christmas trees are 'worth it,'" Nolasco said. "Many of the converts said specifically that getting a real Christmas tree can be a hassle but it's worth it. That's what we're trying to achieve is to remind them how great it was in their home. It's a fun time and something the family can talk about for years to come."

Next steps

Big data projects like this have a variety of benefits for the CTPB and its members. For one, the team at FleishmanHillard is able to put together some smart recommendations for the upcoming season, which include:

- Tell consumers that real Christmas trees can make the holiday more "authentic" and "special."
- Remind converts that real Christmas trees are "worth it."
- Retailers should make the in-person purchasing process as easy as possible and provide educational resources for how to maintain a healthy tree and recycle it easily.
- Acknowledge that purchasing, maintaining, and disposing of Christmas trees can be imperfect, but that is what adds to the feeling of authenticity.

Conant, who handles media relations for the CTPB understands that consumer data is a critical piece in media relations.

"We want to make sure the media sees the Christmas Tree Promotion Board as a resource for data-oriented information on the tree industry," Conant said.

Armato added that these annual dives into consumer thoughts and behaviors will help the CTPB fulfill its ultimate mission – to increase long-term demand for real Christmas trees.

Research 2020-2021

Christmas Tree Research Projects Funded by the CTPB

The CTPB approved thirteen research projects for funding for FY 2020-2021, from a record number of grant proposal applications. The CTPB spent over \$250,000 for research in 2020-2021. These thirteen projects demonstrate a diverse mix of research topics and diverse regional impact. Elongate Hemlock Scale (EHS) is the subject of two separate grants that add to current funding for research of this important pest. A project at West Virginia



Dr. Matt Kasson and Dr. Brian Lovett in Ashe County, NC, where the EHS biocontrol fungus was first discovered.



Stephen Corbett (PhD student) is injecting ethyl formate into a small temperature-controlled chamber that contains branch samples.

University has identified a possible fungus for biocontrol of EHS. Control of EHS with chemical pesticides is challenging because chemical interventions are broad spectrum and may make matters worse by killing natural predators of EHS. Also, the life cycle of EHS makes their control even more challenging. A second cooperative Washington State University and North Carolina State University project tested fumigation of harvested Christmas trees with ethyl formate to control the spread of EHS through Christmas tree shipments. While higher doses of ethyl formate did control EHS on harvested Christmas trees, it also damaged the trees. The next step test hydrogen cyanide in this same manner.

As a continuation of the CoFirGE project, the CTPB provided funds to Oregon State University for the collection of seed from the Trojan fir region that excelled in previous research. An excellent seed production year allowed for the collection of enough seed to complete all experiments and to distribute to a variety of locations across the country to research the adaptability of this species. The study of needle loss variation in top performing CoFirGE trees by Washington State University identified individual trees with superior needle loss characteristics and revealed that needle loss patterns from individuals across regions were highly correlated. These projects truly are a cooperative effort by Christmas tree researchers and include field plots in all major growing regions of the United States.

Washington State University received funding for two studies that can greatly improve the availability of seed for the Christmas tree industry. The first examined the efficacy of heat treatment of Nordmann and Turkish fir seed to control *Megastigmus* larvae. Researchers determined that 45 degrees centigrade for twenty-four hours killed 100% of the larvae. Further studies will examine seed viability after treatment.

A second project at Washington State University is testing several different storage temperatures and moisture levels on imported and domestic Nordmann/Turkish seed to determine a

technique that will improve vigor and viability of stored seed. The increasing interest in growing exotic firs, such as Turkish, Trojan, and Nordmann firs, as Christmas trees in the United States is limited by the consistent availability of seed from proven high-quality seed sources of these species.

Virginia Pine breeding research was funded for a second year with Texas A&M Forest Service to improve seedlings available for this important southern Christmas tree species.

Studies on the effect of growing media and container geometry are being carried out at North Carolina State University to provide guidelines for Christmas tree seedling and transplant producers. In addition, funds were approved for Spotted Lanternfly education provided by Virginia Tech for Christmas tree producers in states newly impacted by this very invasive pest.

The study of cultural and chemical control of coning in Fraser firs continued at Michigan State University. This project builds on ongoing research to develop techniques for reducing cone formation through application of plant growth regulators (PGRs), post-emergent control of coning with organic herbicides, selection of Fraser fir for delayed coning, and understanding control of coning in true fir Christmas tree species.

Balsam fir genetic variation of needle retention and timing of bud break is under investigation at the University of New Brunswick. The data will provide information for use in managing Christmas tree production impacted by climate change.

The CTPB has funded or committed over \$1,200,000 for Christmas tree research. We are committed to providing funds that improve the science behind producing and selling quality Christmas trees. A full listing of research projects funded by the CTPB can be found on our website at

<https://www.christmastreepromotionboard.org/research/>

WWW.CHRISTMASTREEPROMOTIONBOARD.ORG/RESEARCH/

2020-2021 Financials

CTPB is required to have an independent Certified Public Accountant audit its accounting records each fiscal year in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards. The fifth audit of CTPB was completed in October of 2021 by Propp Christensen Caniglia, Roseville, CA. They issued a clean opinion of CTPB's financial statement, also known as an "unmodified report" in accounting terminology. These highlights from the audit provide an overview of CTPB's financial status at the end of its 2020-2021 fiscal year. Please visit the CTPB website to see the full audit report <http://www.christmastreepromotionboard.org> (the audit is posted on the Industry Information page).

STATEMENTS OF REVENUE AND EXPENSES – MODIFIED CASH BASIS

For the Year Ended July 31, 2021 and 2020

Revenue:	2021	2020
Assessments	\$1,789,800	\$1,937,885
Donations	\$2,214	-
Interest Income	\$4,247	\$10,168
Total Revenue	\$1,796,261	\$1,948,053
Expenses:		
Promotion Committee	\$948,172	\$1,005,247
Research Committee	\$345,846	\$234,616
Industry Relations Committee	\$24,944	\$28,151
Special Projects		\$4,357
Professional Services	\$211,688	\$213,027
Independent Evaluation	\$1,500	\$30,000
Education	\$12,025	\$14,706
Board Meetings	\$763	\$28,703
Compliance Auditing	\$33,433	\$62,378
Bank Fees	\$4,292	\$5,174
Insurance	\$1,566	\$1,576
Office Expenses	\$4,148	\$2,482
Other Administrative Costs	\$8,317	\$6,277
USDA Fees	\$76,874	\$79,449
Total Expenses	\$1,673,568	\$1,716,143
Change in unrestricted net assets	\$122,693	\$231,910
Net assets without donor restrictions, beginning of year	\$1,432,269	\$1,200,359
Net assets without donor restrictions, end of year	\$1,554,962	\$1,432,269

STATEMENTS OF ASSETS, LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS – MODIFIED CASH BASIS

July 31, 2021 and 2020

	ASSETS	2021	2020
Assets:			
Current Assets:			
Operating Cash		\$1,633,155	\$1,481,275
Cash Reserves		\$224,668	\$228,515
Total Assets		\$1,857,823	\$1,709,790
	LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities:			
Accrued Expenses		\$302,861	\$277,521
Net Assets without donor restrictions:			
Designated by the Board for cash reserves:			
Reserve for future projects		\$107,318	\$107,318
Reserve for Research		\$117,350	\$121,197
Undesignated		1,330,294	\$1,203,754
Total Net Assets		\$1,554,962	\$1,432,269
Total Liabilities and Net Assets		\$1,857,823	\$1,709,790



Christmas Tree
PROMOTION BOARD

PO Box 77
Howell, MI 48844

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Information



Meet the Board

Eastern Representatives:

Chuck Berry, Georgia
Renee Beutell, North Carolina
Charles Fowler, North Carolina
Gary Westlake, Pennsylvania

Central Representatives:

Derek Ahl, Wisconsin
Jane Neubauer, Ohio

Western Representatives

Mike Cocco, California
Roger Beyer, Oregon
Bill Brawley, Oregon
Bob Schafer, Oregon
Mark Schmidlin, Oregon

Importer Representative

Larry Downey, Quebec, Canada

Meet the Staff

The CTPB is managed by Gray Management, LLC:

Marsha Gray – Marsha Gray – Executive Director,
marsha@christmastreepromotionboard.org

Cyndi Knudson – Director of Research
Research@christmastreepromotionboard.org

Jenny Tomaszewski – Administrative Assistant
jenny@christmastreepromotionboard.org

Beth Kohn, BAK Bookkeeping – Bookkeeper

Contact Us:

Christmas Tree Promotion Board

P.O. Box 77
Howell, MI 48844
800-985-0773
info@christmastreepromotionboard.org

E-Newsletter

E-Newsletter – All growers (even small farms that are exempt) are encouraged to sign up for the CTPB e-newsletter. The e-newsletter is the best place to get up-to-the-minute details on our promotion and research. To find sign up, please make your request at:

info@christmastreepromotionboard.org
800-985-0773