

IN-DEPTH EXCLUSIVES

Designing Authentic Interactions: How Bruster's Real Ice Cream Personalizes the Customer Experience

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As we close in on Q2 in 2023, the overall market is starting to see which loyalty trends are having the most effect on consumers this year. These trends keep loyalty programs relevant and engaging for members. However, determining how and where to invest in loyalty varies from brand to brand and often resembles a moving target. To keep their fingers on the pulse of customer loyalty, brands like Bruster's Real Ice Cream continually focus on effective interaction with their customers, listening to and implementing their suggestions and creating unique experiences to add value to

every visit.

Loyalty360 spoke with Jennifer Brinker, Vice President of Marketing for Bruster's Real Ice Cream, about how the brand creates authentic customer experiences, stays up-to-date on trends in personalization and employee engagement, and collects and leverages customer behavior data.

Tell us a little more about you, all that you do at Bruster's, and maybe a fun fact about yourself?

My name is Jennifer Brinker, and I'm the Vice President of Marketing for Bruster's Real Ice Cream. In my current role, I am responsible for leading a high-performing team to design and execute clearly defined and fully integrated marketing and communications strategies that drive growth and amplify brand messaging, as well as innovate product based on consumer trends and opportunities. I've been with Bruster's for nearly eight years and have tried just about every flavor of ice cream the company has produced! Prior to Bruster's, I led the marketing for GNC for nearly 13 years.



Can you give us a short history of Bruster's?

Bruster's was founded in 1989 by Bruce Reed, who wanted to share his passion for fresh premium homemade ice cream and a stellar customer experience in a fun, family-friendly atmosphere, where guests can gather to make memories and celebrate special occasions. He opened our very first location in Bridgewater, PA, which is where our headquarters is still located. In 1993, Bruce began franchising the locations, and we've been growing ever since. Currently, there are almost 200 Bruster's Real Ice Cream locations in 22 states, Guyana, and South Korea, with more on the way this year.

Bruster's is built on delivering a premium fresh-made product. We control the product from cow to cone, focusing on freshness and making only what is needed to serve daily, which results in a premium product that is never deep frozen. It all starts with a proprietary homestyle mix made the old-fashioned way, with ingredients that are slow kettle processed and designed specifically to create the iconic Bruster's flavors. Bruster's owns a dairy in Titusville, PA, which produces its proprietary homestyle mix and delivers it fresh from the dairy to each store, where small artisan batches of decadent flavors are made by Certified Ice Cream Makers, right in the store where they are served.

We continue to open one great store at a time and welcome new franchisees to our family! Bruster's offers flexible design options: free-standing and end-cap. Both fit the walk-up window model and can accommodate patio seating areas. If available, franchisees are encouraged to add a drive-thru for customer convenience. In colder climates, alternative designs are offered to account for customer comfort. More information can be found at www.brustersfranchise.com (<http://www.brustersfranchise.com>).

Can you tell us a little bit more about Bruster's loyalty program – how the program works, how it came about, and the benefits for members?

Our Sweet Rewards Loyalty program is a way for us to give back to our most loyal customers. Customers can join our program via our website or by downloading our app. Just for signing up, they'll receive a \$3 reward, and from then on, they'll earn 1 point for each \$1 they spend at Bruster's. For every 50 points earned, our loyalty members will receive \$5 in rewards. They also get access to exclusive offers throughout the year, a special birthday treat, and are the first to know about new flavors. The rewards are automatically loaded into their account each time they shop, and the app provides a barcode for our scoopers to scan once it's time to redeem or they can identify themselves at the serving window via the phone number in which they used to sign up.

Can you define what customer loyalty means to you and your organization?

Customer loyalty is what drives our business. It's why we've been able to succeed and continue to grow after all these years. That loyalty pushes our creativity, helping us create new and delicious flavors or fun and exciting ways to engage with our customer base. We aren't just selling premium ice cream; we are serving smiles and creating memories that last generations.

Being one of the top loyalty programs by Newsweek last year, what do you feel has worked well for your loyalty program to attain that achievement?

Our loyalty program is easy to use. We have a custom app for our customers to download, and everything they need is held right in there. Their point balance, their barcodes, their special offers – it's all at their fingertips. It's convenient and simple, and with special double point days sprinkled throughout the year, our customers have the chance to earn their rewards fairly quickly.

An important topic we hear from brands is their increased interest in personalization. How are you – as a brand – looking at personalization?

We try to be as authentic as possible in our marketing. We want our customers to know that they are engaging with real people behind the scenes at Bruster's and that we take their suggestions and opinions to heart. We really look at this brand as a family and personalizing the experience for our customers only enhances their loyalty to us. We encourage our customers to engage with us on social media, we host promotional events at our franchises such as PJ Day, where customers show up in their pajamas for a free waffle cone – anything to build that relationship with them and let them know that we are more than just a brand. Additionally, we provide many ways for our customers to experience our brand at our stores, through online ordering and third-party delivery.

Each and every trip to Bruster's is customizable! More than 150 decadent recipes are available on rotation to comprise the Bruster's treat collection. At least 24 premium flavors are prepared fresh daily in each store where they are served, ready to be enjoyed in crunchy, handmade waffle cones (that also are made in-house), sundaes, candy filled blasts, and milkshakes. Customized cakes and pies round out the menu. Complementing its freshly made ice cream, Bruster's only uses premium add-ins and brand-name candies in its treats. We also added 17 vegan oat milk flavors to our recipe rotation so that all our customers can enjoy.

How does employee engagement and/or loyalty fit into the customer loyalty discussion? Are employees trained or engaged with differently today? How do you see this going forward?

Employees want to feel valued and respected. If they don't, then they won't show you any loyalty. "Mentoring Tomorrow's Leaders Today" is Bruster's community promise. Most of our scoopers are high school or college students. Our franchise owners act as mentors to these young adults and teach them the keys to successful entrepreneurship. We provide an environment that is fun, safe, and inviting as well as a learning environment. Our operators are very active, upstanding members of their communities.

There is a good deal of discussion around data: effective collection, data privacy, challenges with third party data, moving towards more declared data, uncertainty around the "walled gardens" and other potential regulations – What are the challenges you face with data, analytics, and creating insight today?

We are shifting towards a fully defined first-party data strategy. Engaging with our customers and understanding their needs equips us to create a positive experience as we guide them to our brand through any commerce path. We remain open to emerging technologies and opportunities to propel growth and measure effectiveness of our customer-centric solutions.

What is the biggest challenge you face in your role? How do you see that changing?

Remaining agile and continuing to incorporate technology evolution into our brand's strategy in an effort to exceed consumer expectations and buying behaviors in an uncertain economic environment. Leveraging real-time data to create personalized experiences for our guests to stay ahead of the curve. Continuing to innovate based on

understanding our customers' needs, as we did with our early 2022 launch of Non-Dairy Vegan flavor offerings made with Oat Milk.

What can Loyalty360 do to help your customer loyalty program?

Just by letting our customers know that they can download the app to sign up for Sweet Rewards or via our website at www.brusterssweetrewards.com (<http://www.brusterssweetrewards.com>)

Either way, they'll start earning rewards immediately. We are excited to welcome new members to our Bruster's Sweet Rewards family, and we appreciate Loyalty360 for helping to get the word out about our program.

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