

## Case study: Dave's Sweet Tooth

*Based in Harrison Township, Michigan, Dave's Sweet Tooth makes a variety of artisan toffee products. Since launching the company in 2011, founder Andrew Chmielewski has grown it to more than \$1 million in annual revenue and 14 full-time-equivalent employees. To further the company's expansion, Chmielewski entered Michigan's statewide Economic Gardening program in January 2017, which enabled him to work with the National Strategic Research Team (NSRT).*

"The researchers were great," said Chmielewski. "They took time to get to know us, where we were at, and what we envisioned for the next 12-18 months. They went above and beyond what we ever expected to get from the program."

"It was a fascinating engagement and good example of how to use data in an effective and tactical way," said Matt O'Connor, an NSRT member who served as team leader on the engagement. To help Dave's Sweet Tooth with its growth objectives, the research team leveraged geographic information systems, market research and search engine optimization tools to identify new consumer customers as well as new retail and distribution channels, O'Connor explained.

Among specific deliverables, the researchers:

- Analyzed the company's website — providing a report card and suggestions for increasing traffic and converting more surfers into customers.
- Created a demographic profile of current consumer customers. NSRT member Clay Smithers first evaluated data from the company's website orders to see where people were ordering from, how often they were buying and how much they were spending. Then, using Tapestry segmentation data, Smithers found that the majority of customers fell into two groups: affluent suburban households and wealthy retiree households. Using other datasets, Smithers then identified regions around the United States where those consumers could be found — along with retailers that appeal to those demographic groups.
- Developed a list of retail vendors, including grocers and big-box stores that are similar to the ones Dave's Sweet Tooth currently works with, along with contact information.



Andrew Chmielewski, founder of Dave's Sweet Tooth in Harrison Township, Michigan

## Case study: Dave's Sweet Tooth

- Created a list of potential distributors and independent sales reps in regions outside of the Midwest.
- Provided a list of watering holes (associations, trade shows, networking events, media publications and online forums) relevant to its toffee products.

“Andrew knew of traditional food shows and events, but he wanted to find adjacent ways to market his company’s products,” observed Shelly Stobierski, an NSRT member who specializes in market research. With that in mind, she investigated complementary industry associations, such as florists, bakeries and food ingredients, identifying their trade events and publications. “For example, florists might want to sell Dave’s toffee in their stores as a package deal with flower deliveries — or ice cream stores might want to incorporate the toffee as an ingredient for their ice cream,” she explained.

“The list of watering holes was a big takeaway for us,” said Chmielewski. “There were more trade shows than we had anticipated, and these events are a great opportunity for us to meet buyers, both distribution companies and individual retailers, to increase the visibility of our products.”

The information gleaned from the demographic profile was also eye-opening, Chmielewski added. “We thought we were catering to a certain audience, but it turns out that it wasn’t as niche and narrow as we thought,” he explained. “It was great to see all of our customer profiles and how much each one accounted for our online sales.”

In response to the Economic Gardening research, Dave’s Sweet Tooth is now tweaking its website and developing a game plan for future trade show participation. It’s also using the research to create a media outreach program and send samples and information directly to potential new distributors and retail buyers.

“We’re very excited about the future and what we’re able to accomplish,” said Chmielewski, who expects to double annual revenue within the next year and add more jobs. “The lists the researchers provided included some large distribution companies and retailers. If we got interest from only one and they took us to full capacity, it would increase our business by 50 to 100 percent.”

“I thought the Economic Gardening engagement would require more time on our part,” he added. “Instead, the researchers did all the heavy lifting, and the process was painless. The results will be invaluable for us going forward. I’d highly recommend this to any second-stage company that is looking for ways to grow their business.”



*The National Center for Economic Gardening is a partnership between the Edward Lowe Foundation and Chris Gibbons. NCEG helps state and regional organizations establish Economic Gardening networks, delivers Economic Gardening services and maintains national standards in training and certification. To learn more, visit [www.edwardlowe.org](http://www.edwardlowe.org).*