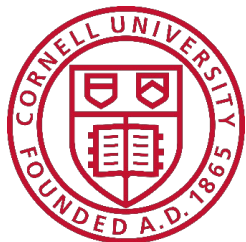


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*This article is the fourth in a series focusing on vendors who are selling their wares at the Western New York Welcome Center's **Taste NY Market**. Thank you to Ann Jordan, owner/operator of Pickle Annie's for taking the time to share the Pickle Annie's story along with some marketing tips and strategies.*

Spotlight on Pickle Annie's

Ann Jordan is the owner, operator, and chief cook and pickle packer at Pickle Annie's Homemade Specialties in East Aurora, New York. Ann packs fresh pickles, relishes, salsas, pet products, and more recently, flavored apple cider vinegars and hemp products. Some of Ann's recipes have been in the family for over 100 years. She emphasizes that all her products use only all-natural ingredients. Unlike most pickle recipe's, Pickle Annie's recipes are salt and preservative free. These gourmet refrigerator pickles have quickly become popular both because of their unique flavor profiles and because many people are avoiding extra salts in their diets.

Ann says she began making pickles more than 40 years ago. Nine years ago she started selling them at local farmers markets including the Lancaster New York Farmers Market which she owned and operated for a number of years. Her products can now be found in local grocery stores, deli's, specialty stores including the Western New York Welcome Center's Taste NY Market, and on-line through the web page [Pickle Annies](#) and Facebook page (facebook.com/PickleAnnies). Ann says her pickle recipes have been Cornell-tested and approved and she has registered and renamed recipes according to her branding model.

Along the way, Ann found herself regularly tossing out "gallons and gallons" of vinegar byproduct. She also noticed that some customers enjoyed the flavored pickle juice so Ann decided she would offer pickle juice as an alternative to the cider vinegar being marketed for its health benefits. Her moniker is "it tastes good!" She feels the benefit of her product is that people continue using it rather than giving up. Ann believes her main competitors' unflavored organic cider vinegars are not always tolerated well – in part because people don't like the taste of straight vinegar day after day.

Pickle Annie's flavored apple cider vinegar was originally branded under the name "Pickle Back Juice." Ann has found that marketing idea to be a bit confusing for consumers. Unless Ann or her husband, Alan, are demoing the products and can personally explain the term, "pickle back juice" leaves potential customers wondering what it is and why they might buy it. Part of her marketing adjustment is a

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rebranding of the product. “Pickleback” or “pickle back” is a term that refers to pickle brine. In the tavern and bar world, pickleback can be used as a chaser following a shot of whiskey, bourbon or other spirits. Ann had hoped to be able to market her cider vinegar to area bars, but “that just didn’t go.” Now she has something else in mind as a long-time proponent of the health benefits of apple cider vinegar. Ann says apple cider vinegar has long been popular in the natural health community, but not everyone tolerates daily use of straight cider vinegar. She says that’s the advantage of her line of flavored apple cider vinegars. With eye-catching, intriguing names including “Mosquito,” “Prairie Fire,” “Gator,” “Amore,” and the most popular flavor, “Sunday Breakfast,” Ann provides customers with options that help to support daily use of her apple cider products. Along with the “mine tastes good” slogan, her demoing sign says “Take a Tablespoon Daily.”

Pickle Annie’s features a variety of pickle flavor profiles: hot, dill, and sweet. One of Ann’s marketing strengths is her creative naming ability. Just a few additional examples include: “Armadillo” (Texas hot pickle with a kick); “Firehouse Hots” (very hot dill pickle with special spices); “Ogorek Mini’s” (traditional Polish pickle); “Tom’s Undressing” (tastes like turkey dressing); Bog (cranberry orange taste with a touch of heat); “Cinnamon French Toasts”; “Pina Colada”; and “Quaker Chip” (sweet and spicy with cardamom).” Ann says, “these delicious offerings will surely be a hit with your family and guests, enhancing favorite dishes and spicing up your table.” A full list of Pickle Annie’s flavors can be seen on the web page. Many of the pickle varieties in her 30-pickle line are only produced seasonally to keep production costs down.

Hemp oil, currently sourced from out of state suppliers, is a very recent addition to Pickle Annie’s marketing mix. She is blending the hemp oil with flax seed oil and adding flavor profiles similar to the pickle and cider flavors for palatability. She did some experimenting with infusing cider vinegar with hemp oil but “that just doesn’t work” because the hemp oil is so heavy. She’s currently working on evaluating the proper price point based on her various costs and scale of production and distribution. New York State Ag. & Markets and the federal Food and Drug Administration also restrict the ways that hemp oil (cannabidiol) can be blended and sold. Keeping the line separate from other products avoids those legal issues.

Annie says she needs to find a new web designer/web master, since, sadly, her “web guy” passed away in September. Updating the web page is one of her big marketing tasks over the winter since a big chunk of her business is based on on-line sales with shipping through UPS. Shipping costs are a major consideration in her marketing and distribution plans.

Annie says her marketing continues to be “taste driven.” Even with fun, creative naming and labeling, people have to taste them first. “Who would buy a ‘bog pickle’ just based on seeing them on the shelf?” Demoing continues to be critical to developing her customer base. She’s learned that the funky and hot flavors may catch people’s eye but she’s refining her product line to those flavors that work best for a daily regimen.

Being branded for “Pickle Annie” isn’t perfectly aligned with her current product focus on the cider vinegar and hemp oil. That’s forcing some reevaluation of her marketing plans. She still uses Facebook and a periodic newsletter to help get the word out. Much of her marketing remains word of mouth driven and still relies on product demoing. The 2 month labeled shelf life of refrigerator pickles is a

distribution and marketing challenge. Combined with production and distribution costs, that's part of the reason Annie is shifting to the cider vinegar and hemp oil products.

Ann says she feels she's maxed out on what she can charge for her pickles and vinegar products at the scale of her small production kitchen. Ann explained an important market message is you have to decide how you want to spend your time - not only on what works for your products but also what works for your personality and time constraints.

Ann offered some basic marketing tips. You don't know who the public will be at any particular venue until you've tried it out. You have to situate yourself so it looks good and work with the customer traffic flow. She said, "I'm a really good sales person. If I get to talk with someone, I can get them to buy." But she warned that spending 20 minutes with someone to get them to buy something means you've missed other people who could well become returning customers. Product pamphlets help but that's not the same as one-on-one, face-to-face customer interactions in describing product benefits. "You have to be aggressive to engage people who would otherwise be flying by or visiting the adjacent vendor instead," she said. She also said how many customers are missed by people staffing vendor booths with the focus on their cell phones. "Put the phones away."

Ann hopes to see increases in on-line sales. That's part of what she will be working on in her marketing plan and in bringing on a new web page consultant. As a life-long educator and sales person, Ann also says she would be happy to help mentor people, especially in the area of customer engagement and sales. See the Pickle Annie web page for contact information.

Pickle Annie's operates under the business "Hubbard Road Farm." The 200 year old family farm, located in the Town of Aurora, was once owned by Elbert Hubbard. In the interest of full disclosure, Ann and Alan have been neighbors for many years. My first introductions to her pickles and pickle juice were at their annual neighborhood holiday party. Thanks to Ann for taking the time to visit about Pickle Annie's unique mix of products and for sharing some of her marketing ideas and experience.



Taste NY at the Western New York
Welcome Center is operated by:

Cornell Cooperative Extension Erie County

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