

marketing

grewal & levy

Newsletter for Instructors

October
2026

A Voyage to Sales? How Publishers Are Leveraging Hype Around The Odyssey Movie to Sell Their Versions of a Classic Work of Literature.....	1
Use with Chapter 1, “Overview of Marketing,” and Chapter 12, “Developing New Products”	
Not New, but Certainly Improved: Form Portfolios Sells Forgotten Furniture Designs	3
Use with Chapter 2, “Developing Marketing Strategy,” and Chapter 6, “Consumer Behavior”	
Menu Experiments at McDonald’s: A New Frontline in Fast-Food Fights for Market Share.....	4
Use with Chapter 5, “Analyzing the Marketing Environment”	
Snaxshot, the Snack Oracle.....	5
Use with Chapter 5, “Analyzing the Marketing Environment” and Chapter 10, “Marketing Research”	
Natural Burials Offer Another Way to Go	6
Use with Chapter 6, “Consumer Behavior” and Chapter 12, “Developing New Products”	
A Monster Hit: Toho Plans Global Godzilla Expansion	7
Use with Chapter 8, “Global Marketing,” and Chapter 12, “Developing New Products”	
Moving the Goal Posts on World Cup Ticket Prices	8
Use with Chapter 8, “Global Marketing” and Chapter 14, “Pricing Concepts for Establishing Value”	
Baby Steps: Little Spoon Revolutionizes Baby Food	9
Use with Chapter 11, “Product, Branding, and Packaging Decisions,” and Chapter 20, “Personal Selling and Sales Management”	
Fur Babies: Casio Sells Robot Guinea Pigs	10
Use with Chapter 12, “Developing New Products”	
“JUST&T Married!” How Can and Should Firms Leverage a Star-Studded Wedding Event?.....	11
Use with Chapter 19, “Advertising, Public Relations, and Sales Promotions”	

If you are interested in the textbook, you can learn more about it [here](#). If you would like to see this newsletter and the previous editions, go to: <https://grewallevymarketing.com/newsletters/>

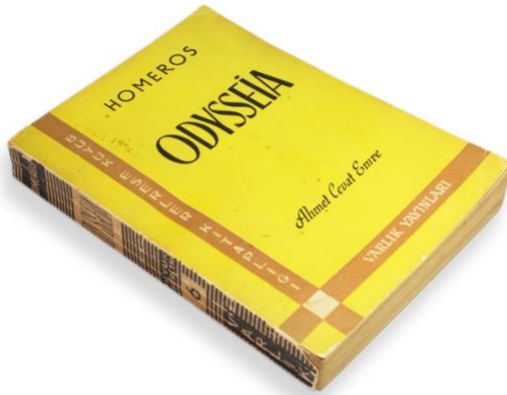
marketing
grewal & levy

Mc
Graw
Hill



A Voyage to Sales? How Publishers Are Leveraging Hype Around The Odyssey Movie to Sell Their Versions of a Classic Work of Literature

Use with Chapter 1, “Overview of Marketing,” and Chapter 12, “Developing New Products”



istockphoto / yalcinadali

Usually, when we talk about marketing familiar products, we might be referring to things that have been around for a while and have changed little, like soap or Corn Flakes. But what happens when the product being marketed is truly, legitimately ancient? Homer’s famous verse narrative of how Odysseus made his way home from the Trojan War likely was composed in the 7th century BCE, according to scholars, meaning that it’s been around for nearly 3000 years, during which time it has been read by millions of students, scholars, and poetry lovers. How can a marketer create excitement about a product that old and familiar?

Fortunately for publishers that maintain book versions of the epic poem, innovation arises even for ancient texts. Multiple translators have undertaken their own attempts to bring the ancient Greek text into modern languages, to make it accessible

to today’s audiences. Because translation is inherently subjective, the different translations provide somewhat different approaches and versions of the text. For example,

In the 17th century, George Chapman crafted a deeply poetic, rhyming version that featured iambic pentameter.

Robert Fitzgerald published a version in 1961 that is widely familiar to students who have been assigned to read *The Odyssey* in their high school classes over the past half-century or so.

Emily Wilson’s 2017 translation has been described as “provocatively blunt” and modern in its approach. It also features iambic pentameter, and it gives far more voice to the female characters than previous translations have done.

When Daniel Mendelsohn released his translation in 2025, he “deliberately replicated Homer’s long lines and attended carefully to the poem’s metaphors, tone, level of diction and word choice,” seemingly in an attempt to make the experience of reading the text similar to what audiences in ancient Greece would have experienced.

All of these editions and releases prompted some attention and discussion, especially among scholars and lovers of Homeric poetry. But that was nothing compared with the hype surrounding the 2026 release of a film version of *The Odyssey*.

Directed by a well-reputed and well-known director (Christopher Nolan), starring some of the biggest names in film (e.g., Matt Damon, Lupita Nyong’o, Zendaya, Robert Pattinson, Anne Hathaway), and produced in a novel way (i.e., the first feature filmed with an IMAX 70 mm camera), the movie seemed destined to be a blockbuster. Recognizing this potential, the distribution company, Universal Pictures, began hyping and marketing the film more than a year before its actual release in theaters.

As anticipation among audiences grew, many of them realized that their familiarity with the famous story was weak or nonexistent. To prepare to watch, enjoy, critique, and discuss the film—all of which tend to be key to experiencing a cultural blockbuster—many consumers sought out book versions.

To cater to their needs, different book publishers have actively pushed and promoted their editions, using distinctive and creative tactics. For example, Picador delayed the release of an updated edition (which it previously had planned for 2025), featuring a new cover, foreword, and afterword, waiting until just before the movie opened in theaters to install it on shelves. Penguin also reissued its version with a brightly colored new cover, depicting several of the monsters and characters made famous in the poem.

Beyond the packaging, publishers have purposefully highlighted and reinforced the distinctiveness of the different translations. W.W. Norton, which owns the rights to Wilson’s translation, noted the controversies surrounding her approach and encouraged buyers to host read-alongs and book clubs to not just read this version but also discuss why it might spark wider debate.

[Back to Top](#)

Mendelsohn has been visible in the popular press, writing articles about the poem and the movie, which implicitly directs readers to buy his version, published by the University of Chicago.

Homer's epic creates excitement on its own, which is part of why it persists as a classic story, told over millennia. But to convince consumers that a specific version of the poem is the best choice to purchase, marketers have to develop their own, specific type of excitement.

Discussion Questions

1. List the marketing strategies adopted by the different publishers of various editions of The Odyssey to get readers to purchase their version, rather than competing versions. Which seems most effective to you?
2. How have marketers seeking to sell different products (e.g., toy manufacturers, video game publishers) leveraged the popularity of other blockbuster films to garner excitement about their related offerings?
3. What kind of innovation are new translations of an ancient poem: radical, incremental, or something else?

Sources: MJ Franklin, "To Sell Homer's 'Odyssey,' Publishers, Like Its Hero, Get Crafty," The New York Times, July 20, 2026; A.O. Scott, "Which Version of the 'Odyssey' Is Right for You?," The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/books/100000010971102/which-version-of-the-odyssey-should-you-read.html>; Daniel Mendelsohn, "The Immortal Appeal of 'The Odyssey,'" The Free Press, July 10, 2026.

Not New, but Certainly Improved: Form Portfolios Sells Forgotten Furniture Designs

Use with Chapter 2, “Developing Marketing Strategy,” and Chapter 6, “Consumer Behavior”



istockphoto / KatarzynaBialasiewicz

The design style now known as mid-century modern first came into vogue during the 1950s and 1960s, driven by the post–World War II economic boom and optimistic attitudes that encouraged U.S. consumers to embrace creative designs in their living spaces. Creative furniture makers like Eames and Herman Miller became aspirational brands, with their funky, distinctive approaches that helped redefine what everyday objects—a chair, a lamp, even kitchenware—could look like and the meaning they could convey.

It’s a different century, marked by substantially different societal and economic conditions, but mid-century modern furniture is enjoying a resurgence in popularity today among consumers who appreciate the bold colors, designs, and conceptualizations of these long-gone designers. Genuine antique items by the big name designers sell for a

steep premium; copycat versions tend to offer insufficient quality. A market gap thus arose, between the demands of consumers who wanted to embrace a mid-century modern vibe and the products available to meet that need.

It is this market gap that Form Portfolios aims to fill. The Danish design firm specializes in finding underappreciated intellectual property, in the form of designs or actual furniture that had been conceived of or crafted by lesser-known designers. That is, many mid-century furniture makers never gained the renown enjoyed by Eames or Herman Miller, but they left behind a substantial amount of high-quality, well-constructed products, as well as the intellectual rights to their designs. Their heirs seemingly failed to recognize the potential value of what their parents or grandparents had bequeathed them, despite the renewed popularity of the style. Others regarded the effort of trying to restore pieces or start production on the designs, and then price, market, and sell the stock they had inherited, as just too excessive.

Form Portfolios’ founder Mark Masiello recognized a solution to the problem that also represented a substantial opportunity. The treasure trove of surplus designs promised a wealth, of both possibilities and revenues. Therefore, Form Portfolios actively pursued and purchased the property rights to many designs; in other cases, it struck a deal with current estate owners that provided them royalties on each sale but granted the rights to produce the designs to Form Portfolios. Through these efforts, it obtained the rights to nearly a thousand designs and began production.

To get the newly produced versions of historic designs and the original pieces to market, Form Portfolios established partnerships with several retail firms, including CB2. In the space of about five years, CB2 released products based on more than 100 of the designs acquired by Masiello. In so doing, it has revived the reputation and sales appeal of designers that, for whatever reason, remained overlooked during the twentieth century, such as Paul McCobb. Such efforts benefit the reputation of the artists and their heirs. Of course, they also increase demand for their designs; in heavily promoting work by the Murano-born lighting artist Carlo Nason, Form Portfolios can transform its holdings into artistic creations, worth whatever price it wants to charge.

As noted, mid-century modern design goes beyond furniture though, a perspective that might explain the form that Form Portfolios’ continued expansion has taken. Specifically, Masiello chose to purchase the Dansk kitchenware line. Founded in the 1950s, Dansk designs are synonymous with the clean lines and sculptural details that represent staples of mid-century modern design. In acquiring the brand for the seemingly undervalued price of just \$250,000, Form Portfolios was able to expand its offerings and its brand reputation. It also earned sales far, far in excess of the purchase price, through its subsequent sales of Dansk pieces.

Discussion Questions

1. Explain and compare the value of a chair designed by Herman Miller versus one designed by a (thus far) largely unknown designer. How is Form Portfolios attempting to change this comparison?
2. One expert compared the company’s process to the tactics that film studios use to reboot old superhero franchises. How are the two marketing strategies similar, and how do they differ?

Sources: David McCabe, “Can You Reboot a Lamp Like a Superhero Franchise?,” *The New York Times*, December 28, 2025; Form Portfolios, <https://www.formportfolios.com>; “Reports: Food52 Sold in Three Pieces at Bankruptcy Auction,” *HomePage News*, February 10, 2026.

Menu Experiments at McDonald's: A New Frontline in Fast-Food Fights for Market Share

Use with Chapter 5, "Analyzing the Marketing Environment"



istockphoto / bhofack2

Competition is never static. Even if a firm might explicitly embrace a customer orientation, it also must account for competitive moves and strategies, to avoid losing some of its revenue or market share to another firm that releases a new offering or tactic. When it comes to the highly contested market for fast food customers, that demand is especially intense.

McDonald's might account for an enviable share of the overall market, but it still needs to keep track of what other restaurants are doing, then respond appropriately. For example, Popeyes—whose fried chicken sandwich introduction back in 2019 effectively redefined the fast food competitive landscape and initiated the “chicken wars”—recently made moves in two notable directions. First, it altered the available flavors, by introducing truffle-flavored menu items. Second, it shifted the form in which

consumers could get their chicken, by releasing a line of chicken wraps.

Accordingly, McDonald's announced two innovations of its own, seemingly reflecting the expanded flavor and forms being pushed by its competitor. First, it brought the toasted, caramelized flavor of brown butter to its breakfast menu. Two new breakfast sandwiches, one with bacon and egg and the other featuring chicken, carry the flavor in a honey-based sauce. Second, it created a variation on its existing formats by creating a Caesar-infused line of chicken strips, wraps, and sandwiches.

Notably, all these introductions reflect culinary trends that traditionally have been more associated with fine dining (e.g., brown butter, Caesar salads and dressing) than fast food. One argument suggests that, as prices rise across the board, fast food offerings need to give consumers a little more incentive to accept their higher prices. In exchange for paying more for their sandwiches, people expect to receive a small sense of luxury, even if they are just grabbing breakfast at the drive-through.

Discussion Questions

1. What factors in the marketing environment are evident drivers of McDonald's new menu introductions? Would you describe its strategy as customer-oriented, price-oriented, competition-oriented, or something else?
2. Why is Popeyes seemingly so often the source of new innovations that spark responses from larger competitors, such as McDonald's? How would you explain this role?

Sources: Annie Campbell, “McDonald's Just Quietly Released 2 New, First-of-Their-Kind Sandwiches,” Allrecipes, July 15, 2026; Tom Parfitt, “McDonald's Adds 4 New Menu Items for a Limited Time,” Yahoo! Finance, July 22, 2026.

Snaxshot, the Snack Oracle

Use with Chapter 5, “Analyzing the Marketing Environment” and Chapter 10, “Marketing Research”



istockphoto / carotur

It's the coolest job that you never knew existed: snack oracle. And there's only one of them so far.

Andrea Hernandez runs Snaxshot, a blog that deconstructs the marketing around many popular products, offering a critical analysis of how food trends start. She also gathers and analyzes the various signals that consumers send, knowingly or not, about which products they're interested in trying next. On the basis of these insights, Hernandez brings logic and order to what might look like coincidence to those not paying attention.

In addition, Hernandez is sitting at the forefront of efforts to capitalize on growing trends among younger consumers, for whom food choices and dietary approaches are increasingly personal and self-reflective, offering a way to define themselves. In a world in which the goal of getting sufficient

protein takes on nearly obsessive proportions, while at the same time semaglutide and diet culture promise to give people seemingly magical access to thinness, the personal relationships that consumers form with the products available in snack aisles can be a bellwether and predictor of trends to come.

Snaxshot specializes in linking food microtrends with more macro-level social indicators, and the predictions that Hernandez publishes have long been remarkably accurate. In recent years, she anticipated, announced, and then helped shape the “affordable affluence” trend, in which cash-strapped consumers rely on small consumable luxuries to create signals of their own wealth. Food is one of the most popular choices for achieving this illusion, be it an investment in a \$30 smoothie or purchases of J.Crew's new limited-edition pasta, which Snaxshot dissected last year.

Hernandez also has detailed the implications and trends surrounding various supplements and enriched products, including the ways that they inform and alter perceived gender roles. For example, she noted the arrival of Man Cereal, a 100 percent real, actual product currently on grocery store shelves. The product's main claim to distinction, and the basis on which it is marketed, seems to be that it is enriched with creatine—though as Hernandez skeptically added, what creatine has to do with masculinity is unclear.

Even as she challenges certain food trends and claims though, Hernandez acknowledges and emphasizes the power of consumers' food choices, as a source of information about the modern-day world. With enough data, she argues that food choices could be used to predict the outcome of presidential elections and economic patterns.

Such claims resonate. Snaxshot may have a relatively modest following, but it counts some notable figures, including the Head of Innovation for the international food conglomerate Nestlé, who asserted: “If you're not subscribing to Snaxshot and you're in [the food and beverage industry], then you're missing out.” Hollywood celebrities and famous chefs also appear throughout her follower lists.

To maintain these followers, and her position as a reliable source, Hernandez remains firm in insisting that her role is as an independent reviewer. The site is estimated to bring in more than \$100,000 in revenues each year, but Snaxshot has never accepted money from the companies whose products it reviews. In the future, Hernandez also hopes to expand the reach of her predictive models, adapting them to television and book content. Following in the footsteps of one of her idols, Anthony Bourdain, the snack oracle remains committed to examining and understanding food, the people who consume it, and the impacts for the world.

Discussion Questions

1. What other products are closely linked to a consumer's personal identity? Could analyses of microtrends in any of these markets be used to predict larger sociocultural patterns as well?
2. Think about your own snack choices. What do they say about you, as a consumer?

Sources: Rachel Sugar, “She Knows Your Next Favorite Snack Before You Do,” The New York Times, August 29, 2025.

Natural Burials Offer Another Way to Go

Use with Chapter 6, “Consumer Behavior” and Chapter 12, “Developing New Products”



istockphoto / Impresyjna Fotografuje

Because death is universal, the market for end-of-life products is literally everyone. Yet even in such a comprehensive market, different consumers express distinct preferences and wants, such that marketers need to frame their offerings to appeal to those needs.

Consider, for example, consumers who prioritize environmental choices in their day-to-day lives. For them, an environmental choice in death also is likely to be particularly appealing. A green or natural burial refers to an option that eliminates the uses of embalming chemicals and non-biodegradable materials and instead relies on natural decomposition. It also encourages people to choose their burial garb intentionally, with a focus on natural, biodegradable materials, such as woven caskets and linen shrouds. Such burial practices thus avoid the creation of noxious gasses that result from cremation, eliminate demands on energy to treat the body, and prevent the introduction of toxic or carcinogenic

chemicals woven into clothing into the environment. Such considerations are acute, considering that chemicals in buried clothing or accessories have been known to pass into the soil and nearby waterways, affecting local ecosystems.

People who choose natural or green burial options also tend to assert that it represents an intuitive choice. It also might enable them to avoid the human and religious rituals often associated with death. The goal of natural burials is, essentially, to return bodies to the earth as they came into the world, carrying nothing extra and imposing no harm. Such a fundamental notion resonates powerfully with many existing philosophies, across religions and cultures. Nearly every language and culture embraces the concept summarized by the phrase, “ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” and offers a way to understand death as a return to the start, rather than a final end.

Furthermore, climate-conscious consumers can request that their remains be buried in green burial grounds, which have been planned mindfully, often in partnership with conservationists, as a way to protect existing tracts of land from development. In this sense, the natural burial movement encourages the notion that people can make one last contribution to the world, in a physical, tangible way.

Growing interest in such options accordingly has prompted the introduction of natural cemeteries and conservationist land trusts all over the world. This development is especially notable in the United States, where historically ecologically minded communities in the Northeast are leading the movement. For example, in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, the local cemetery commission notes that every burial in the past two years has been natural. South Carolina also boasts a strong following; the first formally recognized natural burial site is located there. More and more communities across the nation have displayed their support for this natural option, including local measures to create and support natural burial sites.

Discussion Questions

1. How widely accepted are natural burial practices? Where would you place them on the adoption curve?
2. How might advocates of the natural burial movement reach new audiences? Are there any aspects of green burials that seem off-putting?

Sources: Paula Span, “When I Go, I’m Going Green,” *The New York Times*, August 23, 2025; Lisa Weismann, “At Sacred Grove Preserve, Concern for Environment Continues After Life,” *WCIV ABC News 4*, September 29, 2025; “Natural Cemetery to Expand in Georgia County,” *WSBTV Atlanta News*, January 17, 2026.

A Monster Hit: Toho Plans Global Godzilla Expansion

Use with Chapter 8, “Global Marketing,” and Chapter 12, “Developing New Products”



istockphoto / tang90246

Part animation, part allegory, Godzilla first arrived in the global consciousness more than 70 years ago, in the wake of World War II. The brainchild of Japanese media company Toho Co., Ltd., the monstrous reptile was created to represent society’s reckoning with the devastation that nuclear weapons had wrought, as well as to manifest widespread fears about where human society was headed.

All these years later, despite radically altered international relations and shifting global concerns, Godzilla remains a powerful figure. Even if its original meaning may be opaque, it represents one of the most recognizable monsters of its kind, achieving a level of brand recognition that many firms would go on a rampage to attain.

Accordingly, Toho is determined to repurpose and build on Godzilla’s broad appeal. It already enjoys popularity in Japan, functioning as both a production company and

theater distributor, but it has not attained the same sort of international success achieved by its national peers, like Sony and Nintendo. Noting surging interest in anime and other traditionally Japanese styles of entertainment around the world though, the time seems right for Toho to stake its own international claims.

In pursuit of that goal, the company has strategically acquired multiple properties, seeking to diversify its content offerings and expand its presence abroad. Notable deals include a one-quarter ownership stake in Fifth Season, the production company behind the award-winning television series *Severance*. In the United Kingdom, it has established London as its European hub and also acquired an English anime company, Anime Limited. From this foundation, Toho plans to build out its distribution channels throughout France, Italy, and Germany.

Meanwhile, in a partnership with Taiwan’s Brogent Technologies, Toho also expects to make strides throughout Asia. Following the success of the franchise’s first theme park ride, the two conglomerates have worked together to create *Godzilla The Ride*, which simulates a feeling of flying. This updated installation is set to be distributed globally.

Then in the United States, Toho is looking to build on and extend the appeal of its flagship property, primarily through a licensing deal with Legendary Entertainment. A sequel to the most recent of the 36 films featuring Godzilla, *Godzilla Minus One*, already has been confirmed. Discussions also have started regarding the possibility of an Asia-specific installment in the planned movie franchise. At the same time, Toho has installed Godzilla on smaller screens, in collaboration with Legendary, by allowing the monster to appear in a recent season of the animated *Monarch: Legacy of Monsters* series.

Across these diverse, global initiatives, Toho already can count some success. Recent reports suggest that it is on track to double its operating profits within the next six years.

Discussion Questions

1. Suggest some new project options and target audiences for Toho’s global expansion plans.

Sources: Amber T, “Godzilla Will Take London as Toho Forms European HQ,” *Fangoria*, December 19, 2025; “Brogent to Deliver New Godzilla Flying Theater Experience in Collaboration with Toho Co., Ltd.,” *InPark Magazine*, May 11, 2025; Sohee Kim, “Godzilla Conquered Japan. Now Its Owner Plots a Global Takeover,” *Bloomberg*, July 17, 2025.

Moving the Goal Posts on World Cup Ticket Prices

Use with Chapter 8, “Global Marketing” and Chapter 14, “Pricing Concepts for Establishing Value”



istockphoto / pashapixel

Soccer (football) is the most popular sport in the world. For billions of dedicated fans, the opportunity to see the very best talent compete is priceless. But when it comes to the 2026 World Cup, European fans raised serious concerns and complaints about surging ticket prices. Ironically, in the United States, where soccer historically has been less popular than in the rest of the world, consumers appear far more inclined to find justifications for exorbitant costs, whether as a logical response to scarce supply or as a badge of honor that signals the popularity of their favorite team.

Multiple justifications seem necessary, considering the actual prices being charged. Prices for World Cup games reached their highest level of all time; attending the opening match would set a fan back around \$1800. In other

stadiums, preset pricing tiers meant that attendees could expect to pay more for better visibility. In granting the stadiums leeway in the prices they charged, the international governing body FIFA explained that the fees would be set “in accordance with local market conditions.” But the association also has motivation to encourage higher prices, because the more revenues the stadiums bring in, the higher its own profit margins.

Notably, such high prices are not unique to soccer. In a recent Super Bowl, ticket prices started at just under \$1000, and the premium seats required much more. On resale markets, these prices jumped even higher, reaching an average cost in excess of \$8000 per ticket in the week prior to the game. Even Major League Baseball—whose 162 games per season mean that demand usually gets spread out, leading to lower ticket prices—can charge more for playoff games. During game 6 of the 2025 World Series for example, seats were selling for around \$2000.

According to a recent analysis, U.S. consumers are increasingly willing to accept these higher costs to access live entertainment, sometimes even regardless of their objective ability to support such investments. That is, even as they pay thousands to attend a remarkable sporting event or concert, one-third of all U.S. residents, including about half of all adults under the age of 30 years, reported having postponed or avoided seeking medical care due to budgetary concerns. A similar proportion has skipped at least one meal, again due to financial constraints. Such tendencies might have been part of the motivation for FIFA to have staged its 2026 World Cup in the United States.

To encourage attendance, FIFA also hosted random selection draw lotteries that allowed interested parties to enter for a chance to purchase tickets at face value. Millions of tickets sold through this system, but millions more people were left without tickets. For them, resale markets provided the only option, which FIFA also sought to leverage. It launched its own official resale marketplace in the lead up to the World Cup, on which prices quickly skyrocketed.

Discussion Questions

1. Do sport governing bodies like FIFA have an ethical obligation to regulate resale ticket prices?
2. What might explain U.S. consumers’ apparent willingness to pay nearly anything for live event tickets?

Sources: Adam Crafton, “Exorbitant World Cup Ticket Prices Could Ruin Hopes of Growing Soccer in the U.S.,” *The New York Times*, December 12, 2025; Alton Northup, “How Much Will Philadelphia’s World Cup Tickets Cost?,” *ABC27*, December 15, 2025; Shafaq Patel, “How to Get 2026 FIFA World Cup Tickets,” *Axios*, December 11, 2025.

Baby Steps: Little Spoon Revolutionizes Baby Food

Use with Chapter 11, “Product, Branding, and Packaging Decisions,” and Chapter 20, “Personal Selling and Sales Management”



istockphoto / a_namenko

According to Angela Vranich, parents are no different from any other consumers: They want products that enable them to fulfill their goals. And for most parents, those goals revolve largely around taking the best possible care of their children. Although she first came up with the idea for Little Spoon to meet the requirements of a college project that tasked students with offering proposals for advertising organic food, Vranich quickly recognized the untapped market potential that existed among adult consumers who sought to not only eat organic foods themselves but also give their children natural food offerings.

After graduation, Vranich expanded the operations she had started in her dorm room to develop a line of wholesome, nutrient-dense baby food, made from fresh ingredients that had been sourced ethically. Building on the original puree blends, formulated for infants, Little Spoon soon began extending its product lines,

largely in accordance with children’s development milestones.

For example, as they reach the age of about 4 months, children can start eating cereals, so Little Spoon developed baby cereals that provide easily accessible sources of essential vitamins and whole grains. Most of the products are free of common allergens and include no extra additives or sugars. Then as their children grow, parents can switch to Little Spoon’s Babyblends+ ready-made meals and select the formulation they consider most important. One version contains ingredients believed to support brain development, another promises to boost babies’ natural immunity, and yet another line features probiotic-rich formulations, modeled after trendy gut health products but designed specifically to meet a baby’s needs. For toddlers, who are notoriously picky eaters, Little Spoon provides dedicated snack options that parents can make available to ensure their nutritional needs are met.

Beyond such age- and development-oriented product lines, Little Spoon is experimenting with new product variations that can extend its portfolio in other directions. Recent tastings and development strategy meetings featured new breakfast offerings, as well as seasonally introduced foods, such as a pumpkin spice smoothie. Another potential expansion would move the company into competing for a share of the children’s vitamins market.

Having convinced Target stores to stock most of its product offerings, in a deal reached in late 2025, Little Spoon needs to expand its production capabilities to match its growing product portfolio. At the moment though, Vranich and her husband continue to oversee the day-to-day workflows of the more than 100 employees that work both at the company’s New York headquarters and across remote locations.

Seeing something you’ve created grow and develop can be very rewarding—whether that something is a baby or a company. It’s also a lot of work, and it requires new resources at each stage. In this sense, Little Spoon might take inspiration from target consumers to plan its own expansion.

Discussion Questions

1. Is defining product lines according to young children’s development stages an appropriate strategy, or should Little Spoon adopt a different categorization?
2. How can the founder of Little Spoon continue to maintain control over the company while also scaling up its production capabilities?

Sources: Lia Picard, “How the Head of a Baby Food Company Spends a Day Taste-Testing,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 2025; Will Newton, “Little Spoon Adds Pouched Meals,” *Food Business News*, June 5, 2025; Brooke Just, “Little Spoon Serves Up Organic Oatmeal Baby Cereal,” *Baking Business*, October 29, 2024.

Fur Babies: Casio Sells Robot Guinea Pigs

Use with Chapter 12, “Developing New Products”



istockphoto / Irina Vasilevskaia

Most companies, when introducing their latest robotic technology to the market, emphasize the advanced engineering and cutting-edge designs to encourage consumer adoption. But that’s not the route Casio has taken for its latest introduction. Rather, it aims to deemphasize the tech and instead prioritize the cuteness of its Moflin robots, which look like little guinea pigs.

The term moflin, derived from the Japanese word mofumofu, meaning “fluffy” or “soft,” is designed to evoke the tactile feeling of softness. When used as a product name, the hope is that it will tell potential buyers that, by purchasing a Moflin, they can anticipate comfort and snuggles. The adorable little robots can gather and implement various environmental cues, such that they develop individual personalities, learn their owners’ preferences for interacting, and mimic their sleep and breathing patterns. Their current operating systems boast the

possibility of exhibiting more than 4 million distinct characteristics.

At a price of around \$400, they’re far more expensive than their real-life rodent counterparts, yet Casio already has sold more than 10,000 in Japan, its domestic market. Distribution is currently expanding into Western markets, and the company has published five-year predictions, anticipating that the Moflin will represent a \$34 million product. Already, Moflins have exceeded the company’s initial sales goals, and demand in the U.S. and U.K. markets shows notable increases.

Such predictions reflect the current reality, which is dominated by what some experts describe as a loneliness epidemic. According to the World Health Organization, more than 15 percent of people around the world struggle with their sense of a lack of connection. Consumers in Japan, which hosts one of the oldest populations in the world, appear particularly at risk.

As the birth rates continue to fall and mean ages increase, various marketers have sought solutions to meet the needs of changing demographic profiles. Technology already is being leveraged to help mitigate the risks of people living in isolation. Another version of a robotic pet product, produced by Sony, has been deployed in assisted living facilities in Japan, which might serve as a model for how similar systems and products can be disseminated and encouraged abroad.

Yet the appeal of robot pets is not limited to senior consumers. Early sales figures for Casio indicate strong demand among middle-aged women, who seemingly appreciate the comfort they gain from these pets, without the demands created by live animals who need upkeep and care in return. That is, for people already dealing with the demands of their work, children, aging parents, and so on, having a robot that provides comfort without expanding their own responsibilities any further represents a deeply appealing offer.

Discussion Questions

1. Would you be interested in testing one of these robotic animals? How about investing in one?
2. When designing biomimetic technology, researchers often have to strike a balance between realism and unsettling imitations. What traits in engineered pets do you find acceptable and which seem to cross the line?
3. Are these robot pets appropriately priced? Justify your answer.

Sources: Megumi Fujikawa, “Casio Wants to Break into Wellness Tech. Its Plan? A Fluffy AI Robot,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 16, 2025; Berk Kutay Gokmen, “AI Robot Pet with Unique Personalities Hit in Japan,” *Anadolu Agency*, March 8, 2025; “Casio Launches AI-Powered Robot Pet ‘Moflin’ Amid Rising Loneliness,” *The News International*, September 22, 2025.

“JUST&T Married!” How Can and Should Firms Leverage a Star-Studded Wedding Event?

Use with Chapter 19, “Advertising, Public Relations, and Sales Promotions”



istockphoto / Noe Gonzales

Event-based marketing is a well-established means to garner attention, engagement, and excitement. Usually, it means linking a brand to a regularly scheduled sporting or cultural event, like the Olympics or Oscars. But one of the biggest events of 2026 was not regular in any way, and though it was carefully scheduled, few people knew what that schedule looked like. We’re talking about the wedding of Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce of course—an extravaganza that took over New York’s Madison Square Garden arena, as well as the attention of millions of fans.

To build a connection to this closely followed event, marketers thus had to get creative. Predictions that the wedding would take place at Madison Square Garden in Manhattan over the July 4 weekend leaked in the days leading up to it, but there were no official announcements. Instead, marketers had to move fast, once confirmation came.

The Knot, an online wedding service provider, took an early, and ultimately successful, gamble. It deployed mobile billboard trucks to drive in the vicinity of the arena, posting congratulatory messages while also displaying its logo prominently. For Swifties surrounding the Garden, it provided timely, relevant advertising that might lead those fans to associate their aspiration to celebrate with Taylor and Travis with The Knot, and thereafter think of the company first when imagining their own nuptials or celebrations.

Not every company could achieve such locational relevance though. Instead, Sephora hopped onto Instagram to raise a question that would resonate with any Swifties, and with its own products, namely, “But is she wearing a red lip to the wedding?” From its location in Brooklyn, the Barclays Center also took to Instagram, to propose itself as an alternative venue for weddings and private events.

Less well-known firms also took advantage of AI-enabled tools to adjust the congratulatory message that appeared on the screens outside the Garden once the wedding ceremony finished. Others created satirical videos, implying that their products or services had been selected to furnish the wedding or reception.

Finally, there were a few brands that could plan in advance and make a viable claim to a connection with the event. For example, the Dior luxury fashion house made sure that media outlets knew that both the bride and groom had worn clothing designed by the firm’s creative director. Being known as the company to dress Taylor and Travis establishes a priceless brand connection.

The event marketing strategies adopted in each of these examples thus vary, depending on the extent of connection they could create. Whether they had a metaphorical front-row view or seats in the nosebleed section though, savvy marketers refused to let such an opportunity go to waste.

Discussion Questions

1. When firms without any actual connection to an event suggest such a link, is it simply an exaggeration, or is it an ethical misstep?
2. How can brands design advertising strategies that enable them to respond rapidly to such a massive but secretive event?

Sources: Donna Kim and Sarah Lyon, “Taylor Swift’s Wedding Became a Marketing Moment for Brands, Big and Small,” The New York Times, July 5, 2026; Srividya Kalyanaraman, “The Swift-Kelce Wedding Is What the Luxury Market Needs to Revive,” Yahoo! Finance, July 7, 2026.