

## SITUATION

*Sofo Foods is one of the nation's largest distributors of ethnic foods. Founded in the 1940's by Antonio Sofo, the company is still owned and managed by family, now in its fourth generation. With a focus on quality products and service, the company experienced steady, but massive growth expanding beyond their Toledo, Ohio headquarters to three additional distribution centers in Louisville, Houston and Atlanta. Their fleet delivers to stores and restaurants in 22 states, and they have over 500 employees. To stay ahead of the field of growing competitors requires consistently exceeding customer expectations and demand.*

*Part of the plan for keeping customers loyal relies on offering new products. Thus, Sofo Foods added hundreds of new products spanning a variety of categories. Business continued to thrive, but their leadership team took a step back from the fast growth and realized their brand identity was not cohesive. They needed their long-time agency, Cooper-Smith, to help them solve their brand challenges.*

**Goal:** *Revamp the Sofo Foods brand identity to reflect their premium quality and Italian heritage, while unifying all of their product branding.*

## STRATEGY

To enhance and unify the company's image while aligning product verticals, the agency recommended a brand identity refresh and updated brand architecture. It quickly became apparent that this was a complex brand project, as there were a large quantity of unique products from spices, olive oils and dressings, to cheeses, sauces, frozen foods and more. There were also existing Sofo branded products to be considered, as well as the impact the new branding would have on other aspects of their marketing. And it didn't stop there. Climate conditions for food storage, a variety of materials (boxes, bags, bottles and cans) and of course, FDA guidelines and specifications all added to the complexity of this project.

With competitors in every food category, the agency knew it was critical to do a competitive analysis to ensure Sofo Foods continued as a leading supplier. The list of competitors in the food industry was extensive, but valuable insight was gained on how to develop unique positioning for Sofo's. We found that because they had been in business for so long, there was a fair amount of awareness of the Sofo Foods name.

However, through the Brand Discovery process conducted by Cooper-Smith, other cracks in the brand foundation surfaced. It became apparent that the Sofo name association with certain brand characteristics was lost as they grew to areas beyond their family roots in Toledo, Ohio. Despite their good name, the Sofo's brand fell short of communicating premium quality, and didn't clearly reflect their Italian heritage and old world values.

While Sofo's does have a retail store in Toledo, their business success is primarily built around their distribution of wholesale food products. For this reason, brand was not seen previously as a priority. Labels, packaging, salesmen and delivery drivers were the primary points of impact for customers regarding the brand. Their existing labels were unfortunately all over the board. Some of them appeared very plain, featuring the brand and product name in very simple type on a white label which had a very generic, low cost feel. When in reality, the company is very particular about the quality of all of the products associated with their name.

Cooper-Smith redesigned labels and packaging on everything from parmesan cheese to barbeque sauce, incorporating a consistent design platform and graphic standards. Food industry trends in color schemes, competitor premium products, printer limitations and FDA guidelines all impacted the outcome for the new look.

Even though the corporate business identity is still Sofo Foods, the new label designs dropped "Foods" and just feature the Sofo name, with an associated

banner that says "Imperial Brand" underneath to convey quality. "Since 1949" is also incorporated on the label to communicate the company's longevity and success. This arrangement is the focal point on every label. The product name is then listed in gold type on an attractive red textured background. While the design is very clean and simple, there is now a sophistication and consistency that captures the brand position and personality of the company.

Finally, it was decided that since Sofo Imperial Brand products are not all Italian, they would have a sub-brand for their retail market, which sells a large variety of Italian meats, cheeses, pasta, fresh bread, wine and much more. Italian pastas and other products made and sold exclusively in the company's retail outlets are labeled Sofo's Italian Market and the Italian phrase *Mangiare Bene!* (*Eat Well!*), along with their website [shopsofos.com](http://shopsofos.com).



## RESULTS

Wholesale and retail sales have continued to climb and company leadership is extremely pleased with the new look, brand architecture and standards to guide future product expansion.