

Thrive Together

Recap of our 2025 Sales & Marketing Symposium

On May 14, we hosted a sold-out crowd at the Mississauga Convention Centre for our annual Sales & Marketing Symposium — a high-energy day packed with bold insights, meaningful connections, and forward-looking strategies to help Canada's CPG leaders navigate today's complex market realities.

From evolving consumer psychology to economic outlooks, retail innovation, and leadership under pressure, the event spotlighted the forces reshaping our industry — and how brands can adapt and thrive.

Let's recap the day's highlights.



Brand reinvention in an era of purpose

The day began with opening remarks from Errol Cerit FHCP's EVP, Industry, Public Affairs & Membership Development, who welcomed attendees and underscored the importance of stepping back to engage with big-picture thinking amid rapid change.

That set the stage for our opening keynote from Sandra Sanderson, Chief Marketing Officer at Empire Company Limited and Sobeys Inc., who explored what it takes for a brand to thrive in today's Canadian market. She shared how Empire has moved beyond brand sameness—creating sharp brand edges that distinguish each banner through purpose-driven storytelling and community engagement.

Sandra emphasized the connection between family, food, and sports as a foundation for Empire's evolution, alongside the Scene+ loyalty program's role in deepening relationships through personalization and gamification.



A sharp look at economic uncertainty

Next, Leslie Preston, Managing Director and Senior Economist at TD Bank Group, returned to the symposium stage to unpack Canada's complex 2025 economic outlook.

From shifting global tariffs and a new federal government to questions about interest rate cuts, inflationary pressures, and immigration policy changes, Leslie outlined the many forces shaping business conditions this year.

Her expert analysis offered clear, actionable insights on what lies ahead for Canadian leaders navigating currency volatility, cross-border trade headwinds, and an increasingly uncertain economic landscape.



The future of the Grocery Code of Conduct

In a timely fireside chat, FHCP's Errol Cerit sat down with Karen Proud, the newly appointed President and Adjudicator of the Office of the Grocery Sector Code of Conduct, to explore what's next as the Code moves closer to implementation. Together, they provided an in-depth look at where the industry stands today, how businesses can prepare for participation, and what it will take to uphold the principles of fair dealing and transparency across the grocery supply chain.

Karen offered valuable insights from her unique vantage point—underscoring both the opportunities the Code represents and the shared commitment needed to ensure it delivers lasting impact.





Decoding today's values-driven consumer

Eddie Sheppard, Vice President, Insights, at Abacus Data took the stage next, unpacking the rise of the “precarity mindset” among Canadian consumers. As economic instability deepens and traditional notions of value give way to emotion and identity, Sheppard revealed how beliefs, values, and even national pride are becoming central to purchasing decisions.

He explored how this shift—from scarcity to precarity—is pulling consumers away from purely rational, cost-based choices, and toward brands that reflect their personal and political values. In today's market, meaningful connection requires more than competitive pricing—it demands resonance with who consumers are and what they stand for.



Thriving teams, limitless potential

Award-winning coach Dr. Ivan Joseph delivered an energizing and inspiring session on what makes great teams—and great leaders. Drawing from personal experience, including leading a small college to a national soccer championship and mentoring coaches to Olympic success, Dr. Ivan brought the principles of high performance to life.

Through compelling stories and research-backed insights, he explored how self-confidence, cohesion, and clear expectations can elevate team performance and foster a culture of excellence. His message was clear: when teams thrive, they unlock potential most never knew was possible.



Finding growth in a pressure-filled market

Closing out the program, Carman Allison, Vice President, Business Development for NielsenIQ, delivered a data-rich exploration of the current Canadian retail landscape. With April marking the sharpest rise in CPG inflation in 17 months, and tariffs adding new cost pressures, Canadian consumers are doubling down on value—prioritizing price, convenience, and even patriotism in their brand choices.

Allison examined how these financial concerns are reshaping purchase behaviour and challenging growth, while also highlighting how brands can adapt their strategies to remain competitive and uncover new opportunities in a market defined by pressure and pragmatism.



Charting the path ahead

As we reflect on the day's takeaways, one thing is clear: in a fast-changing market shaped by economic pressures, shifting consumer values, and digital acceleration, successful sales and marketing leadership in 2025 demands adaptability, insight, and bold, purpose-driven action.

It was a robust day of expert speakers, fresh insights, and the kind of meaningful networking our events are known and loved for—including a fun, all-day game where participants matched the well-known character on the back of their nametag with their iconic counterpart, from famous TV couples to classic cartoon duos. The activity encouraged movement, sparked conversation, and added a playful energy to the entire event.

Our sincere thanks to the speakers who challenged and inspired us, the Advisory Committee who helped shape the agenda, and our generous sponsors—NowPac Inc., SPAR Group Canada, Environics Analytics, Mars, Nugleous + SpringBoard Data Management—with special recognition to our Platinum Sponsor, Acosta Group Canada. We're also grateful to Grocery Business Magazine for their continued media support, and to our returning emcee James Cunningham for guiding the day with trademark humour and energy.

Until next year's symposium, let's stay curious, connected, and ready to lead what comes next.

