



Opportunities for the food, grocery & restaurant industry to increase sales

Emerging food & nutrition trends

As a health and wellness expert, it is very difficult to encourage consumers to eat healthier with our inherent love of fat, sugar and salt.

Rather than villainize the food industry for creating yummy unhealthy foods, I'm hoping those in the industry are inspired by some of the emerging trends. There is tremendous opportunity for the food, grocery and restaurant industry to create solutions that will not only increase sales, but actually deliver health.

1. Delicious descriptions: It is no surprise that taste is a priority when it comes to choosing what we eat. Food forecasting firm Culinary Visions Panel asked consumers to list the most delicious food choices, processed foods with minimal nutritional value often made the list. However when provocative menu descriptions that focus on flavour, taste and ingredients are presented, consumers often rated the more healthy options as highly desirable.

This is good news especially since Technomic's Category Close-Up: Vegetables report found that 64 per cent of consumers agree that it is important to eat healthy and pay attention to nutrition (up from 57 per cent just three years ago).

The timing is right for the food industry to focus on healthier choices but the key is to market the foods based on delicious descriptions (and then surprise us with its nutritiousness).

2. The real deal: Consumers are becoming more educated and skeptical of marketing and persuasion tactics used by big business.

Technomic, a food-service research and consulting firm suggests companies will need to continue to provide options that convince consumers that what they are eating is the real deal.

Consumers want sincere, straightforward foods and simple labels. They want to know the truth about the ingredients, where food is from (the more local the better) and that the brands are truthful (if something is positioned as "fresh" it better be).

Ingredients that sound more like a homemade recipe than a scientific concoction are ideal, as are foods that look less uniform and more like it came from a kitchen than a factory.

3. Veggies, vegetarian and gluten-free options: Veggies are no longer playing a supporting role but are starting to appear as the star of the show in the grocery store and on restaurant menus. A report from Technomic suggests that the total incidence of vegetables on restaurant menus has increased 11 per cent over the past three years and is expected to grow.

With more focus on sustainability and environmental concerns, meatless meals and vegetarian options are more popular than ever. Technomic's MenuMonitor database found that restaurant vegetarian meals increased 22 per cent from January-March 2012 from the same period in 2013.

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There will also be continued interest in gluten-free food and restaurant choices. According to market research firm NDP, "gluten-free" is Canada's top restaurant menu health claim, ahead of "low-calorie."

4. Grazing over gorging: As a registered dietitian, I have certainly seen a difference in the way our clients eat today compared to the past. Gone are the days of our grandparents when larger meals and fewer snacks were favoured. Grazing, or eating continually through the day, is trend that is here to stay.

In restaurants and quick-service establishments, consumers are looking for snack-sized-better-for-you options, small taster plates (especially for indulgent foods) and share platters. They are also looking for breakfast foods that are available at any time of the day, farmer's-market style cuisine and late night eating locations.

At the grocery store consumers want grab-and-go options, healthier snacks and entrees and will be interested in fresh prepared cafe options before or after shopping.

Supermarket analyst Phil Lempert, a.k.a. Supermarket Guru, reports that the supermarket is going to become the community centre with community rooms becoming a gathering spot for socializing, cooking classes and connecting. Pete Luckett's thriving trendy gluten-free cafe located in a grocery store in Halifax is just one example.

5. Eating by clicking: Technology is expected to continue to be popular in the grocery store as shoppers use mobile devices to check recipes, compile shopping lists and compare prices, according to Lempert. It is no surprise that the growing number of smart-phone-savvy millennials want and expect information about food and nutrition at their fingertips. According to Progressive Grocer, Millennials are expected to outspend baby boomers by 2017.

Food brands, grocery stores and restaurants will continue to cater mobile friendly information, apps and social media promos to attract attention. Expect to see more online shopping options and users than ever before.

According to the Compete Online Shopper Intelligence Survey food-related content was overwhelmingly the most popular content on Pinterest (57 per cent). An online survey by PriceGrabber suggests one-third of Pinterest users purchase food or cooking items after seeing them on Pinterest.

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