

Tips For Filtering Fads And Finding Trends At IDDBA



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It's that annual adventure into the "trends" at the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA) Show when we have the chance to taste, savor and decide what's going to captivate our customers. When Olson Communications deconstructs the characteristics that give the latest fads the staying power to catch the wave and become enduring trends, here is what we look for:

- **Of-The-Moment Excitement**—Is there something new, fresh and exciting that will lead to long-term value-added satisfaction?
- **Crave Everyday Flavor**—Exotic, intoxicating flavors always create a buzz, but consumers are not going to give up their favorite comfort foods—especially in an uncertain economy. Look for foods that use flavor to add a hint of the exotic to the classics for a safe culinary adventure. And remember, comfort foods are somewhat different for Baby Boomers than they are for Gen Y consumers.
- **The Joy Of Discovery**—Today's educated, intelligent and curious consumers want to feel like they have discovered something special. They want the inside scoop on handcrafted, handmade and one-of-a-kind products.

Olson Communications reviewed more than 20 food shows and conferences in the United States and abroad this year to consolidate its take on the trends. In doing so, we identified three broad categories:

Foods With Integrity

Consumers are looking for so much more than a label when choosing their meals. With the mainstreaming of organic, a whole new set of criteria and characteristics has come into play as skeptical consumers wonder about the real meaning of organic when it appears on the label of a processed frozen food item.

Green City markets are doing a lot to raise consumer awareness of locally grown, sustainable foodstuffs and are drawing attention to the integrity of the process. Farm to School programs are educating schoolchildren and raising their collective consciousness about the food they eat. Consumers are beginning to learn how to discern a "green wash" from a true "green initiative" with the right intentions.

Time is the new currency driving many consumers to grab-and-go convenience foods as a lifestyle choice. When they have a moment to think about their choices, consumers want to see labels with clean ingredient statements—not words that sound like something cooked up in the science lab instead of a kitchen.

Yet, even the greenest, most zealous consumer under-

stands trade-offs. There is an expectation of abundance and variety among American consumers that allows them to accept imported foods if they have a taste for specialty foods not readily available in the United States and confidence in their local retailer.

Cooking methods that are difficult for consumers to replicate at home are also driving flavors and new product development of prepared foods.

Life In Balance

The wellness movement is not about deprivation; it is about having it all and feeling great about it. It is about great tasting, healthful foods that consumers balance individually.

At last year's IDDBA, show, we heard "small is the new big." Small is captivating, but big is okay too, because

U.S. consumers are accustomed to having it all. At a conference earlier this year, research and development chefs shared ideas for introducing stealth health into prepared foods. Stealth health turns favorite foods into healthier alternatives without compromising taste, texture or appetite appeal by adding more vegetables, baking instead of frying, and decreasing the amount of sugar in dipping sauces.

Indulgence is here to stay, but it has to be worth the splurge for consumers so they can keep their lives in balance. It may mean taking a smaller bite or putting a bit more effort into an exercise program.

Authentic Flavors

The deli has been the incubator for consumer experimentation with authentic ethnic foods forever, so what's the news? The news is about how to capture authentic flavors for mainstream consumers. Suppliers understand that being true to several ethnic cuisines might not be reasonable for the typical deli operation, so spice blends, speed scratch, and fully prepared ethnic foods make it easy to be authentic.

Cooking methods that are difficult for consumers to replicate at home are also driving flavors and new product development of prepared foods. An ethnic dish does not have to be replicated exactly, but it must deliver the flavor experience consumers want.

Woks might be fairly common for Asian takeout, but a tandoor oven might be a little more problematic. That's where suppliers of fully prepared, high-quality authentic ethnic foods fit the bill. Authentic flavor does not have to be complicated. Simple, rustic dishes, barely there sauces and clean flavors are on trend as well.

At last year's IDDBA show, we saw dozens of varieties of salt, and each had a story to tell about the place it came from, the process and its unique appeal. But beware of sodium in prepared foods; it's the latest ingredient villain.

So for every trend there is a counter trend; the trick is finding the perfect balance for your customers. **DB**