

A Fiesta for the History Books

The grand reopening of a Chevys Fresh Mex® unit a makes huge community and sales impact.

Chevys Fresh Mex® opened their newest location, and the 102nd restaurant nationwide in San Leandro, Calif., this past August. The San Leandro restaurant had previously been open for several years at another location and was closed for approximately nine months while the new location at a nearby mall was built and opened. Chevys fans that missed their famous sizzling fajitas and fresh-fruit margaritas were invited into the newly opened restaurant to get their fill of the Fresh Mex®, fare they craved and to a fiesta for the history books.

Duke Marketing, a northern California-based marketing firm that specializes in multi-location and franchise organizations, has worked with the Chevys Fresh Mex® brand for several years. They were put to the task of working with the Chevys marketing team to create an unforgettable campaign to launch the new restaurant opening.

Our objectives for this reopening were to maximize the awareness of the brand and restaurant opening and get loyal guests back by creating a huge buzz. The Chevys brand is very well known in the San Francisco Bay Area since Chevys originated the Fresh Mex® concept in Mexican cooking in 1986 with the opening of its first location in Alameda, Calif. by Bay Area entrepreneurs Warren Simmons, Sr. and Warren "Scooter" Simmons, Jr. Currently, there are 102 franchised and company-owned locations by RealMex Restaurants.

The strategies for the campaign focused on unexpected and clever messages to create word-of-mouth and integrate the Chevys brand into the community with a cause-related marketing program. Our goal was to bring back the lapsed and loyal guests, the casual diners and business community. We used a variety of tactics that were uniquely branded to fit the Chevys personality.



Some of the tactics included:

Sombrero Sightings. A street team took Chevys Sombreros, tied with a now open tag and a message that read, "Wear this sombrero into Chevys and get a FREE something," placed in highly visible locations in the community the days leading up to the Grand Opening Fiesta. These locations included the fire department, City Hall, the new library, the BART station and the mall where the new Chevys was located. We put so many sombreros out all over town and watched curious people pick them up, try them on and read the message. The day of the fiesta, we saw more than 40 people wearing them for their free "something," including the mayor, who said someone left one on her desk. The free "something" was a bounce-back coupon, a discount for return visits.

Fiesta Packs. To get the attention of the local media, Fiesta Pack media kits were created. The packs included a Chevys sombrero inside a branded box stuffed with all the makings for a personal fiesta—maracas, Chevys Margarita Musica CD, Chevys hot sauce and, of course, a press release. Several newspapers picked up the announcement and sent photographers to the giant fiesta Grand Opening.

Flyers and Check Presenters. These were created and posted around the community, mailed to area businesses, chamber members, and to the beneficiary of the grand opening event—the Boys & Girls Club—and in check presenters.

Advertising. Multiple media outlets were used to announce the grand opening. Direct mail with an incentive, free-standing inserts in the local paper, newspaper advertisements, radio spots with on-air giveaways on several Bay Area radio stations, a radio remote the day of the event and posters at the local

BART stations. The advertising was just one component in a whole integrated communications plan. All the tactics together created a huge impact—not just the advertising.

The Grand Opening Event. Following the soft opening of approximately 10 days, a Grand Opening Fiesta and Tortilla Toss for Charity took place. After 18 years in this business and executing more than 200 restaurant openings, this Chevys event was one of the very best. The success really stemmed from the overall campaign—all the components—that were uniquely branded to feel like Chevys.

Originally, when we were creating the publicity stunt, we thought of holding a giant guacamole-making contest and trying to beat the world record, but that was going to be an operational nightmare. Instead, we created a totally engaging, fun and entertaining way to impact the community and get publicity.

Chevys Bus. The Chevys Bus, a funky, lime-green bus that has been part of the brand for years and is typically used for taking guests to Oakland Athletics' games, was parked in the lot of the new restaurant the week leading up to the event.

With such a fun icon, we decided to use the bus for a tortilla toss. Three windows along one side of the bus were used to throw tortillas into, and if you made it in window one, two or three, you won a prize. We had maracas, sombreros, Chevys cookbooks, tee shirts and Chevys-branded avocado-and-tomato squishy toys for prizes. Everybody won.



The Tortilla Toss for Charity. The objective of the toss was to get people to donate at least a dollar to take a turn at the toss, and give the proceeds to the Boys & Girls Club of San Leandro, which was the local community nonprofit chosen as the beneficiary. The Boys & Girls Club kids all received flyers to come and enjoy the event and more than 200 showed up to toss tortillas and help raise money. Even the mayor tried her hand at the Tortilla Toss. A generous donation was given to the organization after the event.

Event Area. Some of the most challenging aspects of creating a big event is getting enough space and visibility. We were very lucky that the mall management gave us lots of room in the parking lot to section off and hold the event. They provided

tables and chairs, construction pylons and even paid for a search light for several days as well as the radio remote. The

event took up a huge space right along the entrance and frontage road. The set-up included a welcome table where guests signed in and were entered for a raffle, which was announced on the bus microphone every 30 minutes. There was a face-painting area with bubble machine, a chips and salsa sampling area, a piñata-breaking area, the radio remote and, of course, the tortilla toss area.

More activities. The day of the event, we had hundreds of balloons everywhere. Mariachis on the Move were hired to roam around the event, the restaurant and the mall to draw attention and play their great music. A ribbon-cutting was coordinated in front of the restaurant with the mayor and city council and chamber members. Bounce-back coupons were given to each attendee as they left, and we had scheduled an airplane to fly over with a banner to circle the area. However, that was the one element that didn't come together—the airplane was grounded that day and never made it!

Success!

The number one question... how did we track the success? With so many components to this grand opening, we tried to determine what each element could show as far as results. For example, how many people brought the sombreros in from the sightings, how many kids showed up from the Boys & Girls Club, how much press did we receive, how much money was raised, how many direct mailers were returned, how many people showed up the day of the event and, finally, how were sales at the restaurant before and following the event verses the amount of money spent?

The best way to gage something like this is to remember the ultimate goal—you can only do a grand opening once. It's an investment for the future of the restaurant. Did it create awareness in the community and did it bring in the lapsed and loyal guests? In this case, the answer was yes. The overall results were amazing. More than 500 people came, the sales of the restaurant were strong and have been strong since the opening. The goodwill and community relations can only be measured by the smiles on the faces of the children and guests. And when the Boys & Girls Club president was handed the \$5,000 check, he said, "This is a fiesta for the history books!"

Linda Duke is president and CEO of Duke Marketing in San Rafael, Calif. Her foodservice clients include Noah's Bagels, Rubio's Fresh Mexican Grill, Party America, Papa John's Pizza, Chevys Mexican Restaurants, Jenny Craig International, and Daphne's Greek Cafes. For more information about her company, visit www.dukemarketing.com. She may be reached via email at duke@dukemarketing.com.

