



SPECIAL REPORT: **NRA SHOW WRAP-UP**

Local-store marketing works well if local marketer works hard

By Gregg Cebzynski

If local-store marketing works so well, Linda S. Duke asked her seminar audience during the National Restaurant Association Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show in Chicago, then why don't all restaurant chains do it?

She answered her own question: Because it requires a lot of hard work, creativity and the long-term commitment that restaurant managers either will not or cannot devote to it.

Duke, chief executive of Duke Marketing of San Rafael, Calif., offered advice during the seminar, "Best Local Store Marketing Programs for Restaurant Organizations," and told the audience that local-store marketing is more cost-effective than advertising but that it "requires constant commitment."

A fundamental misunderstanding of that marketing tool is that it can be used sparingly, per-

haps once or twice a year, to produce higher sales, she said.

In reality, Duke said, it works

A fundamental misunderstanding of local marketing is that it can be used sparingly, perhaps once or twice a year, said Linda S. Duke, chief executive of California-based Duke Marketing.

only when restaurant operators map out yearlong programs, whose success can be measured quantitatively.

At the heart of local marketing programs is leveraging the element that makes the business different or unique.

"If you do something different, people remember you," Duke said.

That gives the restaurant a brand identity, which it can convey to consumers through public relations, partnerships with charities and other businesses, and special events, she said.

She urged the audience to establish strong relationships with local food editors and "tell them every time you have something going on."

But be aware of their deadlines, she cautioned. Most newspapers publish food sections on Wednesday, so get news to them before that, she said.

When partnering with a charity or another business, determine how they fit with your type

of business and whether their customers can also be yours, Duke said.

Partnerships can help drive sales both for existing and new restaurants, she said. Typical events are special dinners in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce or a local charity.

New-restaurant openings are ideal events for local marketing, Duke said, but because of all the work involved in opening a new unit, "marketing is often the last thing people think about."

She suggested developing "branded grand openings," which means creating a buzz before the restaurant opens. Using VIPs to talk about the restaurant or getting local radio personalities to give the restaurant airtime can create the type of buzz that will make opening night successful, she said.

Local-store marketing targets consumers within 3 to 5 miles of

the restaurant, and the way to reach them is by creating news, Duke said.

One way to do that is by developing a newsletter to send to consumers and to local newspapers, which can lift items for their own publications, Duke said.

Seasonal menus are a typical local marketing tool, as are dinners centering on holidays, she said, and not just the typical ones. Duke told of one restaurant that holds a special Bastille Day dinner.

Eating contests also are effective in filling the restaurant, she said. Taking food samples to local businesses is a great way to introduce yourself and generate lunch sales, she added.

Make sure, however, to do one program at a time, she said. That allows the staff to become proficient at local-store marketing and won't overwhelm them with extra work.