

Marketing the “Health” Message

by **Linda Duke, CEO, Duke Marketing, LLC.**

In 1989 when I was first starting my restaurant marketing business restaurateurs didn't pay too much attention to marketing healthy menu items. Back in the early 90's healthy brands were very one dimensional, literally, if a product had just one healthy attribute, such as low fat, it made the news.

Today, 21st century consumers are demanding. Menu items developed in partnership with a trusted third party such as the American Heart Association or endorsed by Weight Watchers grab headlines.

With consumers more health conscious than ever, the time is NOW to develop marketing and communications plans for getting your “healthy” messages heard.

A View of Healthy

Developing a “healthy” offering is a process. The popular San Diego based fast casual restaurant chain, Rubio's Fresh Mexican Grill offers guests a HealthMex® Menu which they introduced back in the early 90's. Ahead of its time then and on target for today, Rubio's HealthMex brand includes menu items low in calories, fat, lower in sodium, and

customized to give consumers a choice to stay healthy.

Rubio's is known for the fish taco. The original fish taco is beer battered and deep fried, but

HealthMex Grilled Mahi Mahi	Serving Size	Calories	Sodium	Carbs	Sugars	Protein
	149	150	290	2	0	13

HealthMex offers health-conscious guests grilled Mahi Mahi in their fish taco and racks up only 150 calories.

Rubio's HealthMex is a favorite among athletes, and by partnering with running groups and sponsoring athletic events, Rubio's has seen sales increase.

Creating the Message-Eat Well. Live Well.

Health and wellness is where menu trends have been heading for years. Simple messages, like identifying local ingredients on the menu or having servers talk about reduced sodium, are likely to be noticed by consumers, who are increasingly aware.

Guests want inspired taste experiences. They want to know where their food came from and how to eat healthy without giving up taste. Restaurant operators are responding by adding more fruits,



vegetables, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy and lean proteins to menus. They also are decreasing saturated fats, trans fats, sodium, sugar and excess calories. The need to communicate these changes to guests is key.

When Creating Your Healthy Messages Follow These Tips:

- Focus on local and seasonal
- Focus on where food and ingredients come from
- Focus on how the food was produced and / or processed
- Focus on what it does for the environment and health benefits (heart healthy, etc.)
- Focus on understanding customers' wants.



Give your Restaurant a Healthy-Makeover

- 1. Determine which menu items** could use a down-sized version or calorie reduction.
- 2. Try incorporating superfoods,** Überhealthy foods will continue to sprout including: goji berries, yerba mate, acai and even blueberries, cranberries and soy.
- 3. Does certification on any menu items make sense:** Kosher, fair-trade, organic, American Heart Association, Weight Watchers: such organizations are setting standards to identify healthy consumer offerings. In addition to the credibility they provide, the process of certification itself shines a light on all aspects of an operation.

4. Review ingredients and sizes:

New products geared towards lactose intolerant, gluten free, and sized for correct portion control are increasingly offered as options.

5. Meet with product vendors and discuss new healthy offerings and ask for solutions and ideas. Many foodservice distributors can provide menu development consulting.

6. Create a brand—does it make sense to create a separate healthy menu or heading/name for your healthy line of products? Determine how to communicate these items to guests.

7. Sample. Create a plan for sampling new healthy menu items. Invite health-related clubs, groups and media to taste the new healthy menu.

8. Track customer feedback. Adjust menu items from customer feedback.

9. Position whatever you're doing in steps, as part of a process

Menu for Change:

Communicating the Message

Communicating healthy menu messages can give your brand a marketing advantage and a higher value perception from your customers. Think about this...instead of discounting a menu item, you introduce a new menu item that offers a sustainable organic item like a pear salad, and by communicating the message of where the pears came from, how they were grown and processed, it creates a "reason" to pay more. It is perceived as delivering value and pro-health.

When communicating your health message, develop an inte-

grated marketing campaign focusing on all customer touch points including packaging, website, social media, contest or event, direct mail, samples, signage, point of purchase, press release, advertising, newsletters, employee incentives and customer feedback and surveys.

Remember, developing healthy options for your menu is a process. There are many ways to accomplish your goals but whatever you choose, it is extremely important to market and communicate your message effectively.

For A Healthy Make Over

- Develop a vision toward health
- Conduct menu-assessment
- Aggressively pursue healthy menu development
- Research and test new reduced calorie, sodium and gluten in menu items
- Form supply chain partnerships for healthy menu items
- Set challenging achievable goals, what percentage of menu is healthy?
- Develop strategy
- Identify key messages
- Formalize and launch program
- Measure and track progress
- Promote successes with all stakeholders

About the Author: Linda Duke is CEO of Duke Marketing, LLC, a California-based full service marketing communications firm with expertise in integrated marketing communications for multi-location and franchise organizations. Over the past twenty years, Ms. Duke has consulted with the top restaurant brands in the United States and abroad, and is a nationally recognized speaker, educator and a published author. She speaks frequently at restaurant industry and franchisee conferences motivating and inspiring restaurant operators across the country. www.dukemarketing.com