

Marketing the Ethnic Food Aisle for Increased Profits

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Consumers are looking for ways to add spice to their everyday lives and ethnic food aisles are perfectly positioned to provide solutions and increase grocery profits.

Ethnic foods are on the top of the list of growing consumer market trends and on the rise in grocery stores across the U.S. Grocery stores benefit from this trend by promoting the ethnic food aisle to get the average customer to try something new.

With the increase in food cooking shows and celebrity chefs, customers are becoming more adventurous when cooking at home and are looking for new ingredients and techniques. Ethnic foods are perfect for this purpose. However, the concept of cooking unknown foods and marrying unfamiliar ingredients can be intimidating, even for the most avid cooks.

By providing communications such as in store signage, recipes, displays and demonstrations, grocery operators can increase sales of these highly profitable items and provide customers with new ideas for spicing up their menus.

By planning an integrated marketing effort grocery operators will easily up the ethnic aisle traffic. Creating a plan to re-launch the entire aisle, for example, as an international foods section entitled "Flavors of the World" visually attracts customers and brands efforts using an in-store campaign.

To begin developing your "Flavors of the World" campaign, meet with ethnic food vendors to discuss and invite their participation. Develop sponsored end caps with special promotions complete with ingredients and recipes for creating the perfect ethnic cuisine.

For your plan, create a calendar for the "World of Flavors" activities. Map out the sponsored promotions with your vendors looking at holidays as opportunities to promote different types of cuisine. Promote different countries of the world during different days or months during the year. Ethnic holidays such as Cinco de Mayo and Chinese New Year have been growing in popularity and promoting these holidays using foods and decorations will draw attention and traffic.

For many customers another objection to purchasing foods in the ethnic aisle is they



■ Have a local chef demonstrate cooking techniques to attract attention to the ethnic food aisle and educate shoppers about ingredients with sampling.

don't have the right equipment, cooking utensils and tools. By featuring a tortilla press and warmer with Mexican foods, a rice cooker, Wok and bamboo straining basket for Asian foods, for example, plus incorporating cooking utensils and instructions with each end cap for various holiday or country promotions, grocery operators will add additional sales of non food merchandise.

For holiday or country sponsored events you promote, be sure to incorporate sampling. A great way to attract attention and educate customers about the different ingredients and cooking techniques is to invite a local chef from an area restaurant or from your vendors to do a cooking demonstration and sampling. During the demonstration, display cooking utensils and ingredients. Not only will the demonstration draw attention to the aisle, when customers taste, they will become interested in attempting to cook the unknown.

Another promotional technique is to incorporate an educational activity with local school children. By creating an ethnic foods week for the local schools, grocery operators are reaching outside their walls to connect with the community which will ultimately create increased awareness and sales.

Grocery operators could share ethnic food



■ Try sampling some of the unique foods in the ethnic food aisle. Plastic spoons with a taste work well.



■ Handouts like this two-sided (English and Spanish) given inside the grocery store with a recipe and ingredients needed help drive sales to the Ethnic Food Aisle.

items from cultures around the world to teachers while children learn important lessons about diverse cultures and traditions. Other ideas include inviting area school children to make a traditional craft from another culture, such as "Day of the Dead" masks, to display in the ethnic food aisle, or host a fundraiser with a percentage of sales donated to local schools.

Besides educating children, targeting customers who consider themselves "foodies" with promotional activities is a great way to build awareness and sales of items in the ethnic food aisle.

Create a "Grill-Friends" promotion in which customers use the outdoor space of a grocery store to grill traditional ethnic foods. Set-up grills and let the "grillers" use items from

the ethnic food aisle to promote the ingredients inside so passerby's sampling the cultural foods will come in to purchase.

Creating plans and promotions for the ethnic food aisle is only part of the equation. It is important to have clerks be highly informed about all products to engage with customers. Communicating the ethnic food aisle plan with your staff is integral to your success. Ask for their feedback and ideas. Create an incentive program to get them involved.

As part of the integrated marketing plan for the World of Flavors aisle, other areas that garner consideration are giving bounce back coupons, incorporating items into the weekly circular, in store signage and shelf talkers, posting activities on the website and providing e-news to customers (if you are capturing their email addresses).

Since Americans of all ethnicities are increasingly attracted to ethnic foods of various kinds, it is a perfect opportunity for grocery stores to showcase their "World of Flavors" aisle. Savvy grocery operators will partner with ethnic food vendors, create engaging activities to communicate and educate shoppers. Once grocery shoppers see the benefits of ethnic foods, cooking with them will become far less intimidating and more will be attracted to the "World of Flavor" aisle.



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LINDA DUKE, one of the restaurant industry's foremost marketing experts, started Duke Marketing in 1987 specializing in marketing for multi-location and franchise organizations. Ms. Duke has consulted with top restaurant brands in the United States, negotiated media in foreign markets, nationally and on a regional and local level. Ms. Duke is a nationally recognized speaker and educator and a published author, "http://www.marketing-cookbook.com/" She is an adjunct professor at Golden Gate University in San Francisco. Ms. Duke holds bachelor degrees in both Advertising and Marketing and an Executive MBA from Kellogg Graduate School of Management, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL. Ms. Duke can be reached at "mailto:duke@dukemarketing.com"