Marketing the Ethnic Food Aisle for Increased Profits

By LINDA DUKE, CEO, Duke Marketing

Consumers are looking for ways to add a price 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 chef, 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 buying 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 and executing a marketing effort grocery operators will reap the benefits of the ethnic food aisle traffic. Creating a plan to re-launch the ethnic 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 and 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 activities and 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 don’t have the right equipment, cooking utensils and tools. By featuring a bottle press and warmer with Mexican foods, a rice cooker, Wok and bamboo steaming basket for Asian foods, for example, plus incorporating cooking utensils and instructions with each end card for various holidays or country promotions, grocery operators will add additional sales of non-food merchandise.

For holidays or country sponsored events you promote, so 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, but when customers taste, they will become interested in attempting to cook the unknown.

Another promotional technique is to incorporate 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 can share ethnic food the ethnic food aisles to promote the ingredients inside so people’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 back, giving 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 more compelling and more will be attracted to the "World of Flavors" aisle.

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