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## COMMENT

# Today's food savvy diner wants nutrition as a menu option

A trip to the continent's largest food-service tradeshow this spring made it clear that foodservice suppliers and restaurateurs still have a thing or two to learn when it comes to satisfying customer demands.

The aisles of the National Restaurant Association (NRA) at the McCormick Place in Chicago, May 18-22, crammed a variety of new menu items, equipment and services but most noticeable to this writer's eyes were the number of foodservice manufacturers displaying baked goods, fresh and frozen.

Pretzels filled with pizza filling or sweet cream cheese filling from J & J Snack Food Corp. and a flaky pastry tortilla pumped with smooth cheesecake from Sweet Street

Desserts are only two of the innovations in the category.

Restaurateurs may think a trend towards the easy grab and go items such as cinnamon rolls, scones, bagels, and breakfast sandwiches has taken hold.

And they would be right. The Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association (CRFA) reports in their annual Foodservice Facts, market review and forecast, the same trend developing in this country.

But there's another trend taking place, one that wasn't clearly evident in the aisles of the show.

A seminar at the five-day show had three registered dietitians discussing today's restaurant consumer who they described as more food savvy than ever before. Their

general consensus was that your average diner is smart and knows more about phytochemicals, functional foods and other nutritional issues and since they're eating out more often, they're looking for menus that contain foods that not only taste great but are healthy too.

These rising ranks of diners want health as a menu option. According to Dallas, Texas dietician Georgia Kostas, consumers want a more plant-based diet where fruits and vegetables take a larger space on the plate. They want less fat where sauces, dressings come on the side or low-fat cooking techniques are used. They want portion size options. Half entrée sizes, half sandwiches or three to four ounces of protein were ways to cut the calories but not

the dining experience.

Restaurateurs' conscious of these demands can make adjustments to their menus without a lot of expense. The most critical element is using creativity. "Preparing healthy foods is no different from other foods," says Catherine Powers, a food and nutrition consultant from Seville, Ohio.

I couldn't agree more.  
Santé.



*Natalie Cajic*

## SPOTLIGHT ON BUSINESS

# Make it fast, make it fresh for home meal replacement diners

By Diane Chiasson

Home meal replacement (HMR) refers to full meals prepared away from the home for consumption in the home or an alternate location. It typically refers to home-cooked meals or gourmet-style meals rather than fast food. It is also one of the biggest trends in the foodservice industry.

People are working longer hours and do not want the hassle of preparing a full dinner once they have walked in the door late in the evening. HMR opportunities are outpacing all other growth segments in the food industry because people don't like to cook, don't know how to cook, or don't have time to cook. Families where both parents work out of the home, as well as single parent families, are finding less

time than ever before to prepare home-cooked meals.

Fresh-prepared, ready-to-eat food is a flourishing business in the restaurant and supermarket sectors as companies rise to the challenge of satisfying shoppers hungry for tasty, convenient, value-added complete-meal take-outs.

Just what is the formula for success? It consists of high-quality, fresh foods that taste good and are easy to buy. Convenience is a constant goal. Customers don't even need to sit down in your restaurant. They can call ahead with their order and drop by in the evening to pick it up. Call-in orders account for about half of most operations' business. The internet is also proving to be an invaluable tool to order food with. Most working people have

access to the internet through their work and can order meals online and just pick them up on the way home.

### Marketing and

### presentation of foods

Restaurants can enhance the menu for consumers by providing a large display window, providing maximum food viewing exposure, and offering a choice of wonderfully prepared meals. When customers see a wide array of beautifully arranged appetizing foods, there is an immediate temptation. Displays should be neatly arranged, but not so perfect that a customer would feel that they are ruining the pretty picture by ordering the product. Instead, present some half-filled containers of product that look more

inviting for consumers to buy.

### Speed, convenience and easy access

These are some of the largest selling points of home meal replacement. Offer self-service packages that allow the consumer to pick and choose on their own. Locate take-out counters close to the front end so customers can pick up food quickly without having to go through the whole restaurant. An extra cash register at the take-out counter can speed up service and eliminate lineups.

**Open kitchen.** An open cooking area is a great concept because it allows customers to watch the action in the kitchen. The sizzle and smell of beef tenderloin being sautéed can fill the restaurant with its aroma and

entice customers to make a purchase. Rotisserie ovens are popular because they bring out the aroma and look good. The ability to watch food cooked enhances the customer's perception of freshness and cleanliness. Remember to keep the foodservice areas spotless. Staff should wear clean aprons and gloves when preparing food.

**Special items.** Think of a specialty item you have on your menu and sell it as takeout. For example, if you have a great roast chicken, pack it up and serve it to go with a great side of mashed potatoes and steamed vegetables. It's healthy and ready within seconds at home. Start simple. Don't sacrifice top quality for variety. Know what's good and sell it.

Continued on page 34

# Advertiser Index

**TAKE ACTION** This guide has the contact numbers that allow you to find out more about a product advertised in this issue, and to place an order if you like what you see.

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## Winners of national chocolate competition



Grand winner of Lindt's national chocolate competition.

TORONTO, ON—Sunil Seneviratne repeated his success in the plated desserts category at the annual Lindt National Chocolate Competition, and also enjoyed a new triumph.

As he did last year, the pastry specialist from the Park Hyatt Hotel in Toronto came first this year in the plated category. His

entry had a Bavarian tear drop, chocolate mousse tower, truffle tort dome and a mixed nut tart with white chocolate crème brûlée.

Seneviratne also totalled up the highest score overall of all the professionals, making him the grand prize winner.

Held last month at Le Royal Meridian King Edward Hotel, the third annual Lindt competition drew more than 90 entries.

In a new category this year, savoury dishes, William Brunyansky from the Prince of Wales Hotel in Niagara-on-the-Lake came first in the professional division. The chef from the Ontario wine district triumphed

with a roasted loin of venison with roasted endive, flavoured with a bittersweet chocolate sauce. In the student division of the savoury category, Ritchie Abcede, who entered as an independent, took first place with a consommé in which he placed white chocolate tortellini.

First place in the pralines with centrepiece part of the competition, professional division, was won by independent, Tran Nguyen, whose work, "The Passion of Peter Rabbit", put together pralines filled with coconut cream and sheered coconut, green tea ganache, piña colada with gold pineapple, wild raspberry, grand marnier and pistachio with crunchy pistachio nut.

Another chef from the Park Hyatt, Dayal Yakadawela, had top marks in the gateaux or torts cat-

egory. His entry was a two-parter: a Lindt dark and milk chocolate truffle tort, with macadamia chocolate brownie base and hint of orange flavour; and a Lindt white chocolate raspberry torte with Orio cookie crust base.

On the student side, Mickey Zhao of the King Edward took first place twice, in pralines with centrepiece and gateaux or tortes. Maria Cheung of George Brown College had the top score in the plated dessert category.

The competition was part of a four-day gourmet chocolate exhibition put on by Lindt. The Swiss company used the occasion this year to re-introduce its Excellence line of gourmet chocolate bars. This line includes the new Lindt Excellence 99%, the chocolate bar with the highest cocoa content in the world, and the Lindt Excellence 85% bar.

## Home meal replacement—continued from page 4

### Key ingredients for winning packaging

#### Looks matter

Packaging your HMR products isn't as easy as it seems. There are a variety of factors that have to be considered before choosing a container. The first factor is appearance; customers want to see what they are getting. Attractive packaging distinguishes your operation. It creates an image, just as your design does. The top should be clear so customers can see the food inside. If there is a label on the package make sure that it is either on the side of the package or in an unobtrusive position.

#### Avoid those spills

If you don't want your restaurant barraged with dry-cleaning bills then you should make sure your containers stand up to being transported. Your containers have to be moisture and grease resistant; otherwise the food will seep out, causing even the most

peaceful customer to become irate. And when you send the meal home with the customer, double bag it in plastic. This way even if your packaging leaks you won't have to dry-clean a car.

#### Hot tips

Some like it hot, some don't, but your packaging has to take temperature into consideration. If the product is hot the container must be able to withstand microwaving or heating in a conventional oven. This can lead to more expensive packaging but also prevents oven fires and plastic meltdown. Some packaging can't even handle hot foods. Chemical leakage into the food, containers breaking, melting...all these result from improper packaging. In addition, if your product is not heatable, let the customer know. Write a warning on the package.

#### Cold vibes

Something that is seldom taken into consideration is extreme cold. If the product is frozen, then

the packaging has to be able to avoid cracking in the freezer. Allowing for expansion and brittle plastic can allow the consumer to freeze a purchase safely.

### Match your products and packages

When choosing your packaging, the most important consideration is your food product. You have to take into account what you will be selling before you choose what you will be selling it in. You can end up spending too much on temperature compatible containers if there is no chance the product will find itself in an oven, for instance a Caesar salad.

© 2001 Chiasson Consultants Inc. All rights reserved. Diane Chiasson, FCSI, president of Toronto-based Chiasson Consultants Inc., is a foodservice and retail merchandising and marketing specialist who has worked with high-profile independent restaurants, major hotel and restaurant chains, corporate cafeterias, coffee bars, casinos, clubs, hospitals, colleges and universities for the past 20 years. You can call her at 416-926-1338 or 1-888-926-6655, fax her at 416-921-6994, contact her via e-mail at [chiasson@interlog.com](mailto:chiasson@interlog.com) or visit her web site at [www.chiassonconsultants.com](http://www.chiassonconsultants.com)

## Food inspection agency could be doing better job

OTTAWA, ON—In his latest report, federal auditor-general Denis Desautels found that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is not quite living up to the standards that were set for it when it was created in 1997.

The Agency has failed to develop a consistent inspection program, says the report, released in February, and the number of inspections being performed is not on target.

After a review of 21 high-risk premises, including food processing plants with poor housekeeping and flaking rust and paint near food, the Auditor-General found that in 16 of the cases the compliance problems persisted for months and, in some cases, years.

In the next five years the need to deal with these shortcomings may become even more urgent. Over this span of time, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency will lose roughly 29 per cent of its inspectors due to retirement.

## Coming Events

### June 27-July 1

Canadian College and University Food Service Association (CCUFSA) annual conference, Windsor, ON. For more information contact Wayne Brittenden, conference showcase and sponsorship coordinator at 519-824-4120, ext. 2609.

### September 7-10

NAFEM 01, "The Power of One" trade show and exhibition, Orange County Convention Centre, Orlando, Fla. Contact: North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers (NAFEM), (312) 245-1054 ext. 3238 Fax: (312) 644-0575 Email: [info@nafem.org](mailto:info@nafem.org) Website: [www.nafem.org](http://www.nafem.org)

### September 9-11

Canadian Coffee & Tea Expo 2001 & Coffee Association of Canada's 10th Annual Conference; Toronto Congress Centre & International Plaza Hotel & Convention Centre, Toronto, Canada. Contact 416 784-3831 or [coffee-culture@primus.ca](mailto:coffee-culture@primus.ca)

### September 16 - 19

11th Annual DiRoNa Awards Conference, Queen Elizabeth Hotel, Montreal, Canada. For more information, see Web site at [www.dirona.com](http://www.dirona.com)

### October 13 - 17

Anuga with anuga spezial, Erfurt, Germany. Contact: (416) 598-3343 Fax: (416) 598-9185 Email: [colognet@idirect.com](mailto:colognet@idirect.com)

If your company or association has an event that you would like to promote, kindly contact WHN at fax (905) 206-9972 or e-mail the managing editor at [ncajic@can-restaurantnews.com](mailto:ncajic@can-restaurantnews.com).