

ATLANTIC

RestaurantNews

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COMMENT

Catering to the needs of foreign workers

Across the country, it's no secret that those in the restaurant and hospitality business are faced with many problems—some new, some not so new.



Some of the new ones, higher raw product costs because of the jump in gas prices, ever rising minimum wages, and a struggle to find staff, could prove to be the beginning of the end for restaurants already just getting by on a slim 3.5 per cent gross profit margin.

While government has listened on some fronts, many legislative changes often come too late for those already teetering on the edge.

Staffing issues is not only a problem in Atlantic Canada, but one all restaurateurs across the country commonly share.

In response, government has responded with programs meant to simplify the process for owners of hiring on foreign workers.

In Prince Edward Island, government staff is

going overseas where the employees are to find staff for the province's hospitality sector as they struggle to keep the work schedule full.

The Provincial Nominee Program in British Columbia and Alberta is a pilot project offering permanent positions to line cooks and counter staff—people that have come to Canada as temporary foreign workers.

The Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia recently held a seminar entitled Viable Solutions for Industry Labour Shortages with speakers explaining the Office of Immigration's Nominee Program and the Service Canada Foreign Worker Program. Representatives from the Halifax-based Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association, which helps new Canadians settle in to their new lives, also took part.

Also in Nova Scotia, the Food Protection and Enforcement Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture has started running its mandatory food handling safety courses in languages other than English. (See the full story on page 3). This is a good move.

Courses have been held in Chinese, and another instruction in other languages, including

Arabic, is on the drawing board. Not only is the verbal instruction translated for students, so are the half dozen films shown to students.

This training is timely and much needed given the push by both the federal government and several provincial counterparts to entice workers from overseas to the foodservice and hospitality industries.

If foreign workers are to be welcomed as at least a partial solution to the serious labour shortage, the least that can be done is to speak to them in their language.

Statistics show that the influx of new Canadian via immigration is responsible for the majority of this country's population growth, and to assume that everyone knows or speaks English is shortsighted.

Besides being a valuable service to provide, it also indicates to foreign workers that the industry is looking out for you and making the move to Canada just a little easier.

SPOTLIGHT ON BUSINESS

Food merchandising an easy way to draw in customers

By Diane Chiasson



One of the hottest trends in the restaurant and foodservice industry today is visual food merchandising—the fine art of bringing your products to life with eye-catching visions of freshness, colour, quality and quantity.

When done properly, visual food merchandising and proper cross-merchandising will increase your sales significantly.

Running a foodservice operation takes much more than just displaying the usual information like the “daily special”. As an operator, you must consider what will lure your customers into your operation in the first place. Here are some tips to help you on your way to great food merchandising.

If it looks good, they'll want to eat it

You should build your food displays so that customers can see them from all angles of your facility. Use nothing but the freshest ingredients and colourful food items to catch their attention. Display your food items using uniquely shaped plates and dishes with different textures. Use terra cotta and other environmentally conscious colours, and incorporate natural wood and bamboo to create a more modern, clean and sleek image.

At Country Style Inc. in Toronto, Ontario, the addition of a simple, thick, wooden board placed inside a standard glass display unit for sandwiches emphasized to customers that the sandwiches had just been freshly made. Without the board, the sandwiches appeared stark and left customers wondering if they had been there for days, since a glass and steel display unit tends to evoke a sense of coldness and emptiness. The wooden board added warmth and life.

Tilted European-style wooden racks are also a wonderful tool to display breads, pies, pastries and danishes, so that customers can see the foods from an inviting angle.

Colour is one of the most important factors when dealing with food displays. Because most of the colours in food items tend to be browns and beiges, it is necessary to brighten up your operation with reds, oranges and yellows. Consider looking at what items you might already have on hand in your kitchen, pantry and stockrooms that might add mouthwatering colour and substance to your display.

Cross-merchandising translates into higher sales

In a cafeteria or market-style setting, cross-merchandising is an excellent opportunity to upsell by placing the right foods together. Soups, sandwiches and potato chips should be placed in the same area, while coffee and tea should be served right next to desserts. Side orders and salads could be split. For example, small containers of salad could be packaged and placed on ice next to the grill, as well as stationed next to the sandwiches.

At Country Style, the potato chips were juxtaposed on a high, five-tier metal display next to the sandwiches. This type of cross-merchandising encourages customers to buy a bag of chips to go along with their delicious sandwich.

Coffee is a great partner to bakery items. Sales of beautifully packaged coffee will soar when placed next to bakery items. And don't forget for last minute sales, packaged coffee should also be placed next to your cash register.

Break out the samples

A key element to selling your new food products is by sampling. If you are promoting a new specialty bread, for example, cut a few loaves into small pieces so customers can sample them, and place them next to the soup or sandwich station. Also try different varieties of cream cheese next to bagels, or fresh fruit and whipped cream next to cake and ice cream.

In revitalizing the cafeteria at the Advocate Illinois Masonic Medical Center in Chicago,

Illinois, the benefits of eye-catching food merchandising displays and cross-merchandising techniques were felt immediately. Although we did not actually change a single item on the food menu, several customers commented on how the food tasted better simply because they dined in a warmer and more inviting environment, while sales also increased by 15 percent in the first month. The staff's morale also benefited from the improved lighting, colourful surroundings and satisfied customers.

Proper signage and lighting point the way to increased revenues

It is very important to be clean, concise and to the point when designing the signage for your operation. Make it as easy as possible for customers to purchase food items by providing proper signage that inform your customers about your products so they will buy them. Signage can be displayed in all shapes and sizes, and should be used accordingly. Use branded mini cards to label and price your products, and write short descriptions of the item detailing the ingredients you used or your cooking method. If you insist on handwriting your signs, be sure to make them legible and graphically appealing.

Lighting should be considered at all times when designing your food displays because it helps to sell your products.

Do not under- or over-light key areas of your facility. Lighting is meant to add life to your food products, while showing off the details as well. Strive for a warm, comfortable environment that encourages sales.

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, in addition to supermarkets, convenience stores, specialty food and gift stores 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@chiassonconsultants.com or visit her website at www.chiassonconsultants.com.