



Marketing to Quebecers

What to consider when launching a product in Quebec

How much does English Canada know about Quebecers? Are we really that different when it comes to food marketing? *Food in Canada* spoke to three Montreal-based experts in marketing and advertising to see what they thought.

Stéphane Drouin, president of SV&M, an integrated retail marketing firm: “Quebecers tend to be sensual not rational in their food choices. ‘Made in Quebec’ is a factor but it comes behind taste, freshness, eye appeal and quality.

The star system is very strong in Quebec. In English Canada, probably eight out of the top 10 shows come from the U.S. In Quebec, the top 10 shows are Quebec shows made in Quebec. And Quebecers identify themselves with those stars. When you use a spokesperson, consumers identify themselves with the brand.

We’re going through an interesting phase in marketing in Quebec. Ten years ago multinationals had marketing offices in Quebec. Then marketing became more national. A lot of companies now realize that Quebec is a different market and a lot of marketing investment is coming back.

A lot of companies now shoot commercials in both French and English. A few years ago, they would just dub it in French. It was very insulting to Quebecers. There’s also now a shift from mass advertising to more retail-oriented marketing. So in-store marketing.”

Sean Saraq, director of research and trends, Cossette Communication Group: “For Quebecers food is less of a commodity. It’s part of their famous *joie de vivre*. Festivals are very big. They see themselves as a festive culture and food is part of this. There’s more focus on the gratification of the senses: taste, touch, sight, sound, smell.

There’s a movement toward convenience, but Quebecers are behind the curve on that. They like to make food themselves. Meals are social occasions. Families have the same challenges, but for Quebecers food is more of a priority.

Quebecers like to be spoken to informally, with humour, not sophisticated humour. It’s also an extremely informal culture. If you want to win their hearts and you want to say we’re one of you that’s the way to do it.

Price is a factor given that Quebecers have lower disposable incomes than the Canadian average. But people man-

age to find money for things they consider priorities. Good food is a priority. What pleases them is when they have a chance to get a good deal on high-quality food.

Quebec has an aging population and health and quality of life is growing in importance. The slow-food movement, which started in Italy, may be a counter trend to convenience. They’re more sensitive to health and quality of life and the early warning signs of this would be the growth in organic food. It’s growing in Quebec. It’s more developed in English Canada, but I think that is due to the higher disposable incomes. Quebecers would like to buy more organic, but the price gap is still extremely high.”

Frédéric Blaise, food analyst and principal, Enzyme Communication Marketing Inc.: “The one-strategy-fits-all approach doesn’t work. It is unfortunately a common way of dealing with Quebecers. Quebecers have a personal relationship with food. In Quebec price, taste, fun and curiosity are important factors. You’ve got to make sure that your marketing is done in a way that they’ll experience something new.

Quebecers are price sensitive. But price can help them try a product for the first time. Afterward you’ve got to convince them with taste and communication. Even if the product tastes good, they’ve got to feel comfortable with the image. It’s got to be consistent.

Low-carb is not new in Quebec. Quebecers will probably be part-time low carb dieters. Why? The scientists in Quebec say they don’t see low carb as the ultimate diet. Trans fatty acids are a much stronger issue right now.

It’s more than ever a non-advertising game. You’re selling me a new product, but who are you? Tell me about the R&D behind it. What do you do for my community? That’s what Quebecers care about.

The trend is called *ingredience*: ingredients and conscience. Consumers, especially boomers who spend time studying products, want to know about the ingredients, the brand behind the brand, the social values, the packaging, nutrition – that wasn’t the case 15 or 10 years ago. Instead of just promoting the product, put more information in the creative mix. It includes food safety, HACCP, awards, community involvement.”

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