



Let Us Entertain You

I read recently about a new shopping cart that turns a trip to the grocery store into another opportunity for child-focused entertainment. In Florida, Publix Super Markets are testing the TV Kart, a New Zealand-made, car-shaped shopping cart that features a TV screen playing children's shows. Publix is still testing consumer reaction to the carts, which can be rented for \$1 per shopping trip, before rolling them out to other U.S. markets.

Regardless of the obvious concerns of plopping kids in front of yet another electronic babysitter, the concept also reminds me that consumers today naturally connect food, including the act of dining and shopping, with leisure. Even a trip to the grocery store, which is essentially a chore and a drain on our time-strained schedules, is now expected to be an entertaining experience. And you have to admit, for many consumers, \$1 is a slim price to pay for peace and quiet while browsing nutritional information on fresh local produce, checking out the new natural foods section, or sampling whatever is sizzling on the grill at the in-store kiosk.

Over the past two decades food, and the act of dining out, has become a significant substitute for family entertainment. And I'm not talking about chicken in a bucket with the kids. Consider the number of family oriented chains that are built around a concept or theme, or which feature games, animatronics or similar eye-candy designed to add pizzazz and diversion to a family outing. Eatertainment has become commonplace in the restaurant world. So why is it such a surprise that time-starved consumers are demanding more from their trips to the grocery store? Already many grocery chains feature in-store cafés, and I was amazed to find myself serenaded by a trio of jazz musicians while I shopped at Loblaws one weekend. It's all about adding value, in this case improving the quality of the shopping experience, something consumers today not only expect, but demand.

What does this mean for food and beverage producers? It means taking advantage of this mindset, and accepting what smart retailers already know – that often how you sell something is as important as what you sell. For manufacturers it means that packaging, design and marketing matter. In other words, if you can't persuade someone to select your box of cereal from among the dozens on the grocery shelf, it won't

matter how delicious or nutritious your product is. In terms of packaging, it goes beyond just graphics. Consumers gravitate towards the products that offer creative, convenient packaging and fresh design, produced by companies that have taken the effort to build brand recognition that emphasizes the value-added qualities.

That doesn't mean taste, quality, nutrition and cost no longer count. Far from it. Consumers today are more demanding and informed about everything they buy. It just means that appealing to both consumer tastes and sensibilities is essential in making your product stand out from your competitors. "Packaging is really a part of marketing. We're really talking about influencing sales on the supermarket shelves," says Josh Turner, Communications director of the Packaging Association of Canada (PAC). "So a lot of packaging design trends are driven by the need to capture the consumer's attention. Your product package needs to be different from anything else that's out there."

In 2005 PAC's National Packaging Competition, a biennial competition focusing on excellence in the Canadian packaging and design industries, honoured four innovative packaging designs, including Toronto-based Nestlé Canada's Turtles with the Chairman's Choice award, and Guelph, Ont.-based Sleeman Brewing with the Design Exchange Best of Show Award. "In the case of the Turtles, Nestlé based its whole marketing campaign on the packaging," says Turner. "The box went from a standard tray to individually wrapped chocolates, a window to see the product, and a box that fans out to share." Turner explains that the new packaging implies convenience, space savings, safety (in terms of being more tamper-evident), hygiene and hospitality to consumers. "It's something that looks nice. It can be put on a coffee table and shared with guests," he says. "In the case of some products people are even looking for packaging that matches their home decor, or that communicates class or a high-quality product."

So when you come to rethinking your own product packaging, do research the latest technology (for inspiration see our packaging column on page 24 and our annual packaging report starting on page 26), but please, don't forget to add a little entertainment to the mix.

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