

Pizza Power

Restaurants can reap wonderful profits by offering new twists on the old standby

BY DIANE CHIASSON

Pizza consumption is on the rise, with almost every foodservice operator today offering pizza in some form or another on the menu. In fact, when people were asked to name their favourite hand-held food, pizza was ranked first at 29.2 per cent, followed by fruit at 19.3 per cent and potato chips at 15.2 per cent, according to the Toronto-based NPD Group.

And although pizza has been a standby for decades, what's new is the huge range and variety of pizzas being offered today. Pizza success can be found by simply topping a great pizza crust with premium ingredients, combined in a thematic way — Italian, Indian, Greek or even Buffalo-wing-style. There are endless possibilities, and it's up to you to capitalize on that by merchandising your pizza so that it reaches its full potential.

Specialty Toppings

Pizza has moved away from standard toppings, with new and exciting ingredients topping pizza crusts across Canada. Creative toppings currently popular on pizzas include Feta cheese, Spanish onions, artichoke hearts, tofu, sesame seeds, radicchio, grilled chicken and roasted almonds. Even a standard pepperoni pizza can have a thrilling new taste when you use pesto rather than tomato sauce.

Unique Shapes

Aside from unique toppings, you can also make pizzas stand out by changing the shape of the crust. Try using specially shaped pizzas to tie in with

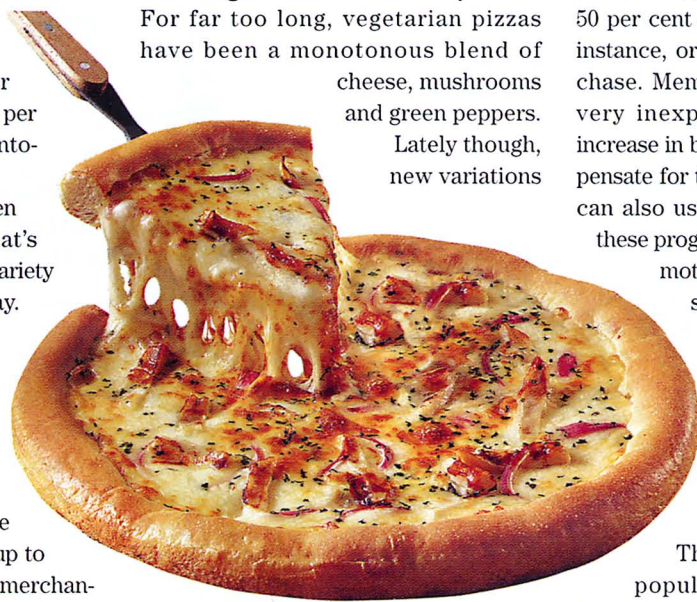
holidays or seasons, such as football-shaped pizzas for game days, clover-shaped for St. Patrick's day, or heart-shaped pizzas for Valentine's Day.

Be Vegetarian-friendly

For far too long, vegetarian pizzas have been a monotonous blend of cheese, mushrooms

and green peppers.

Lately though, new variations



on meat-free pizzas have been emerging to tremendous success. Using ingredients such as eggplant, sun-dried tomato, roasted peppers and asparagus can give vegetarian pizzas a new twist.


Start at the Bottom

Without a great crust, the best toppings will fall flat. Unfortunately, customers often have different views on what makes a good pizza crust. Some like it thick and others like it thin, so your best bet is to offer a few choices. Some restaurants are even offering pizza toppings on pitas or flatbreads. Another popular way of spicing up your crusts is to add specialty flavours such as Italian herb or honey wheat.

Promote Your Pizza

Starting a pizza club can be very rewarding for your operation. Create membership cards that track how much a customer has purchased. After 10 pizza purchases, you can offer the customer 50 per cent off their next purchase, for instance, or free drinks with their purchase. Membership cards are usually very inexpensive to print, and the increase in business will more than compensate for the cost of the program. You can also use information gained from these programs as direct sales and promotion aids. For example, if you see that a card-holder hasn't ordered from you in a while, send out a coupon for \$3 off their next purchase to entice them to return.

Get Online

The Internet is becoming a popular way to order take-out food. Since this trend is showing no signs of slowing down, pizza restaurants that aren't offering online ordering should consider moving in that direction fast. 



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