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Seven merchandising tips for success

The importance of visual food merchandising is so often overlooked. Visual merchandising is defined as selling a product through a visual medium. It is the art of turning a passive looker into an active buyer through the use of colour, texture, lighting, composition and visual communication. When combined with descriptive signs and point-of-sale materials, merchandising increases impulse sales, creates interest and offers a unique experience for customers.

Here are seven tips that can help you incorporate better food merchandising elements into your pizzeria.

1. OPTIMIZE YOUR SPACE USING KEY INTERIOR DESIGN ELEMENTS

The first impression customers have when they walk through your door is conveyed through the interior design of your space. Use can use décor to help build a positive image of your business and create attention, interest, desire that ultimately leads to the decision to buy. Before your customer walks through your door, they will probably look through your windows to see what's inside. Make sure you create a view from your front window that invites them in – a well-lit, fresh and clean environment.

2. DESIGN YOUR MENU PROPERLY

Having the right menu design is what pulls your foodservice operation together, making it an effective merchandising tool. Your purest form of marketing strategy, it ultimately determines the type of customer you attract. A well-written menu lets your customers start tasting the food before it is out of the oven. If you post your menu outside your operation, make sure it is placed in a clearly visible glass panel and offer mini paper menus for potential customers to pick up.

3. COMMUNICATE YOUR PRODUCTS

Potential customers walking by your restaurant do not know how great your food is. You have to tell them you serve great food through your displays and signage. For instance, you could feature a fresh “pizza of the day” from a highly visible angle and surround it with products that have a wide range of colours, contrasts and textures. Then make sure your signage clearly identifies products with a price and a description that lets your customers make their buying decision quickly.

4. USE LIGHTING TO ADVANTAGE

Drawing attention to your products is the first step to completing a sale. Proper lighting is vital to success. Never underestimate the power of quality lighting to make good products look great. For example, use a combination of natural light and different types of lighting such as spotlights to direct your customer's eyes towards certain food areas and to show off your signature items and make the colours stand out. If you have an open kitchen concept in your operation, direct most of your lights at the kitchen, as it is the “main attraction.” Having proper lighting will encourage customers to buy more and stay longer.

5. BECOME A HOUSEHOLD NAME

Understanding your brand and how to convey your message is an essential part of your business operation. Do not try to create a brand that appeals to everyone. You will end up with a brand that is unclearly defined. Start by targeting your brand to the specific demographics to which your restaurant appeals. Is your pizzeria's neighbourhood more family-friendly or full of students? Are you surrounded by busy, condo-dwelling urban professionals? It's important to ensure

your branding captures the culture of these potential customers.

6. ENHANCE YOUR TAKE-OUT

Fast food outlets and family restaurants are eating up more and more of the dollars consumers spend on food every year. Families are finding less time to prepare home-cooked meals, so fresh, high-quality home-meal solutions and take-out foods are now in high demand and are a great way to increase profits and customer service. With take-out it is important to make sure you get it right the first time. There is only one chance to get it right, or the customer's meal might very well be a total disappointment. For this reason it may be worth investing in an accurate order-entry system with point-of-sale software. Even without such a system, every good take-out pizza restaurant needs staff that understand how to complete the order efficiently and correctly the first time.

7. USE CROSS-MERCHANDISING

Customers will often enter the dining area with no clear choice in mind of what they want to eat. Selling incremental add-on items increases the average check size while enhancing your customers' perception of a better, different and special dining experience. Always try to link relevant items on your menu and signage; for example, if you're a dine-in restaurant, pair garlic breads with salads.

The possibilities are endless. Customers need only a bit of prompting before they start buying. •

Diane Chiasson, FCSI, president of Chiasson Consultants Inc., has been helping foodservice, hospitality and retail operators increase sales for over 25 years. Her company provides innovative and revenue-increasing foodservice and retail merchandising programs, interior design, branding, menu engineering, marketing and promotional campaigns, and much more. Contact her at 416-926-1338, toll-free at 1-888-926-6655 or chiasson@chiasson-consultants.com, or visit www.chiassonconsultants.com.